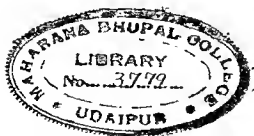


CONTENTS

	Page
1. THE PLACE OF MAN	1
2. ART IN THE WEST AND THE EAST	17
3. RAMKRISHNA PARAMHANSA	55
4. SWAMI VIVEKANANDA	87
5. VIDYAPATI, THE POET OF MITHILA AND BENGAL	109
6. RABINDRANATH TAGORE THE MAN AND THE POET	127
7. MEGALOMANIA IN LITERATURE	157
8. THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE INCARNATION	173

The Place of Man and Other Essays

NAGENDRANATH GUPTA



ALLAHABAD
THE INDIAN PRESS, LTD.
1928

Printed by K. Mitra, at The Indian Press,
Ltd., Allahabad.

· THE PLACE OF MAN

THE PLACE OF MAN

IN the evolution of the human race the various units comprising the human family have not moved at a uniform pace. When the Aryan conquerors and colonists came down from Central Asia and Kashmir into North-Western India, the tract of country subsequently known as Aryavarta and now called the Punjab, there were primitive tribes living in different parts of the country. Mention is made of them in several ancient Sanskrit works. Some of these aboriginal tribes are still in existence but they have been left practically untouched by Aryan civilization and others that have followed it. Elsewhere, as in America and Australia, the contact between a complex and aggressive civilization and primitive barbarism has resulted in the extinction of the primitive races. When, therefore, we speak of the development of human intelligence and ingenuity, we refer to certain favoured races only, dowered with an intellect superior to that of other sections of the human family. The achievements of these races are the heritage of mankind.

To the dawning intelligence of man the phenomena of outside Nature, as seen by the unaided eye, did not appear deceptive or fallacious. To see is to believe, and man accepted the evidence of his eyes without hesitation. To him the earth appeared at rest, fixed and flat, and the centre of the universe round which the sun and moon and the stars are revolving. He accepted the obvious and the palpable as the truth, unaware that his eyes were being deceived. Equally obvious was the fact that man was superior to all other created beings on earth, so that he considered himself justified in designating himself the lord of creation. The fallacy about the earth being the hub of the universe and the stars revolving round it has been exploded, but man looks upon himself as

the lord of creation now more than ever before. It is not that he has no notion of beings superior to himself for the powerful imagination of the early Aryans and their distant cousins in Asia and Europe peopled an imaginary heaven with a host of celestial beings winged and otherwise deathless and superior to mortals.

At the back of the Aryan Greek and Roman mythologies is a vivid and virgin imagination intense poetic and human seeking to explain every phase and phenomenon of nature by the personal cause. The daily miracle of the splendour of sunrise and the glory of sunset inspired the conception of the sun god who drives his fiery chariot borne by flame-flecked chargers athwart the heavens. In the mythological age kings and warriors claimed to be descended from the sun and the moon and the myth is not yet obsolete. Every display of the energy of Nature was accounted for by the conception of a controlling divinity so that myriads of gods and goddesses filled the pantheon. Besides the smiling and peaceful phase of Nature there is also her stern and terrible aspect. The rage and roar of the storm the flare and flash of lightning the roll and reverberation of thunder the awakening and eruption of a volcano the palpitating and quaking of the earth the trailing and mystifying light of a meteoric shower fill the mind with awe and the imagination of man interpreted them as manifestations of divine wrath or unrest. He imagined that as an armed man throws the javelin so the unseen arm of mighty Indra Jupiter hurls the thunderbolt and the god of winds rides the storm.

Even in that age—call it the pagan or heathen age if you will—we need not quarrel with words—some races established their supremacy as conquerors and builders of empires. East and west north and south swept the tide of conquest. The Aryan monarch ambitious for the imperial title let loose the sacrificial horse which roamed at will and every prince or princeling who ventured to seize it was vanquished and had to

pay tribute. The Greek conqueror overran Asia and crossed the Indus. To the chariot of the Roman victor, as he entered Rome in triumph, were chained vanquished princes and captains. At this distance of time, with the perspective of the past to quicken the sense of proportion, we realise that the mightiest empires were mere bubbles that rose and burst on the silent and swift-flowing waters of Time. The pomp and splendour of empire pass as the echo of the tinkling cymbal on the dying wind. There is, however, a subtler, wider and more enduring, though invisible, empire—the empire of thought. Greece and Rome had their share in the building of such an empire, but the most notable contribution is that of the Aryans, who settled on the banks of the Saraswati which has disappeared along with the people who made it so famous. The far-flung borders of the Aryan empire of thought embraced every department of the intellect—the profoundest and subtlest philosophy, the closest and most searching speculation into the mystery of being, epics that remain unrivalled for loftiness of conception and wealth of imagery and detail, a marvellous appreciation of the beauties of nature, poetry and drama unsurpassed in the whole range of literature. These uniquely gifted people have left no architectural monument, no spectacular wonder of the world, nothing in masonry or marble, but they have bequeathed to humanity wondrous palaces of thought, 'towers of fables immortal fashioned from mortal dreams.'¹ The stateliest race in the march past of the nations, the Aryans exalted the thinker and the teacher above the king and the warrior. Kings put aside their crowns and kingdoms as a child throws away a broken bauble, and materialism never established a hold upon the people. One can almost fancy the aroma of thought still clinging to the caves and grottoes and the primal forests of the Himalayas where the *rishis* meditated and sought enlightenment.

¹ Walt Whitman: *Leaves of Grass*,

In the course of his spiritual and intellectual progress man did not rest content with conjuring up a number of minor divinities. It slowly dawned upon him that there must be an ultimate and supreme source of all creation and this brought about the conception of the deity the creator and sustainer of the universe and all things animate and inanimate upon it. Objective in suggestion the concept of God is in reality subjective and that is why the conception of the deity varies so greatly among different peoples. There is the conflict of belief between a personal and an impersonal God. How for instance can one reconcile the conception of the God of the Old Testament with the God of the Vedanta? All conceptions of a personality human or divine must necessarily be finite whereas the conception of the deity synchronises with the Infinite. In the vocabulary of the Aryan thinkers the affluence of words is as remarkable as the subtlety of the meaning but almost every attribute of the deity ends in a negation because the Infinite is elusive and cannot be compassed by positive and finite attributes. Everything in the universe has a beginning most things to our knowledge have an end. Therefore God has neither a beginning nor an end. How can we adequately conceive the Maker who transcends every thing he has made?

In the profundity and breadth of Aryan thought lies the secret of the tolerance and catholicity of the Aryan faith. What matters how one worships his Maker or whether one accepts or rejects Him? Let each one follow the truth as he realises it let each one be suffered to seek the light as he will. Vrihaspati who denied God was a revered *rishi* the Buddha who rejected the authority of the Vedas was an avatar. If the universe is wide should faith be less wide? There is no record of an Aryan Socrates being offered a cup of hemlock to put an abrupt end to the natural term of his life. If man could have realised to the full that there is one God and one faith no matter by how many names the deity is designated or how

many religions men may profess, there would have been no war of religions, no crimes would have been committed in the name of religion, and no religion would have been extolled to the disparagement of another. If men had not been jealous of their God and their religion, the world would have been very different from what it is, and many a cruel chapter in the history of religions would not have been written. The conclusion is irresistible that man's conception of the deity and his idea of religion are defective.

The greatest and most revered teachers of humanity have insisted upon peace and good-will among all men, but has this teaching been followed even by those who regard such teachers as their saviours and the incarnations of the deity? A figure like that of the Buddha or the Christ, bare-footed, homeless and wearing the garments of the poor, moves in unconscious majesty through the vista of the ages, but have the passions of humanity and the antagonism of the nations been stemmed by their teaching? The memory lingers in reverence on these lords of compassion, whose heart-beats recorded every pang of the travail and agony of humanity.

Men have believed that in different cycles of the world's history when the earth groaned under the weight of the evil wrought by man, certain of the elect of the human race, the immaculate and the unsophisticated, have appeared among men as God incarnate. The Bhagavadgita and the New Testament bear testimony to this belief. Far be it from any one to refer to this belief with the faintest suggestion of irreverence. What faith has established reason may not dislodge, nor a captious spirit question. But the expectation is justified that so marvellous a miracle should make for the uplift of the whole race, that the manifestation of the Supreme Being in the flesh should carry the whole of humanity a long step forward along the path of spiritual evolution and each succeeding day should find man nearer to his God. Has this expectation been realised? Let the red pages of history answer.

This world of ours on which we live and have our being it is now known is only a minor planet and the sun itself—that dazzling luminary which gives light and life to the earth—is merely a star of the third magnitude. Is there no life on the other planets that form part of the solar system? Speculation has been busy about the probability of life on Mars, photographs have been taken of what are supposed to be large canals on that planet. A brilliant romancer has narrated an imaginary account of the descent of the Martians on the earth how a few of them moving on curiously contrived machines that looked like gigantic stilts conquered a part of the earth. The obsession of the writer of fiction is the same as that of the hewer of an empire there is the same dream of conquest the same lust for blood as if all created beings whether on this earth or elsewhere have no other aim or object in life. If at any time communication can be established between Mars and the earth it will undoubtedly add to the store of human knowledge but will it in any way influence human conduct? According to one theory of an esoteric doctrine the spirit or soul of man passes from one planet to another thus establishing the planetary chain. It is man first and man always. This ingenious theory does not mention whether there are any living creatures on the other planets. Obviously these planets exist merely as a convenience for the soul of man to flit from one to another.

Beyond the planets and the solar system human imagination and human speculation have not travelled. But the whole solar system is only an infinitesimal fragment of the universe even as we see it. There is the vast void of interstellar space and beyond the stars immeasurable unscalable unfathomable the abode of eternal silence and impenetrable gloom wherein there is no whisper of breeze nor breath of life. The imagination reels as it attempts to contemplate this limitless expanse of nothingness the unbroken silence that holds the antenatal darkness of the universe. And the suns that move round and

round amidst this encircling gloom, are they mere unattended beacons of light wasting their effulgence upon infinite darkness that will not be illuminated? The most powerful telescope cannot focus the lesser bodies in the starry firmament, but is it unreasonable or extravagant to assume that each of these distant suns, many of them much larger than our own sun, has other planetary bodies revolving round them in their appointed orbits? If the stars or suns can be counted by the thousand, their satellites or planets other than those we know can be well assumed by the hundred thousand. Again, reasoned assumption suggests that these myriads of planets must be habited, for it is inconceivable that they are mere arid, lifeless spheres rushing through space. And this life may be infinitely varied, amazingly simple, or incredibly complex. Neither does it necessarily follow that this multitudinous life is a mere replica of life as known upon the earth. Even on our little planet many species of animal life have become extinct. The huge saurians that moved sluggishly in the ooze and slime of the young earth, the towering mammoth and the mastodon, and some other species of animals and birds have vanished, while the milestones in the road traversed by the human race are marked by the bleaching bones of extinct types of humanity. In the many worlds beyond our ken, there may be many species and races of living beings differing radically, physiologically and intellectually, from the beings within our knowledge. There is no question of mythical beings created by the imagination of man, beings beautiful or fantastic, glorious or hideous, but all conceived with the human body as the model. We are not concerned with a figment of the brain but with probabilities based upon substantial data. If it is probable that there are numerous worlds other than our own, it is equally probable that those other worlds are also habited and they may contain beings equal or superior to the human race.

We may go further. What certainty is there that the entire universe is visible to us? How do we know that the

telescope does not mislead us as regards the extent of the universe even as our eyes delude us about the fixity of the earth and the movement of the heavenly bodies? Are all the stars within the range of any telescope? Is the earth most favourably situated for the observation of the universe as a whole? Is it not conceivable that some far off planet revolving round another sun may offer a better point of vantage and an observer from such a place with an instrument to aid his vision may see stars and planets invisible from the earth? Who shall draw the line where the created universe is at an end? These unsolved problems overwhelm the mind and baffle the imagination. And still man continues complacently to regard himself as the lord of creation whereas by far the greater part of creation is unknown to him.

The evolution of a race signifies constant and continuous advancement steady and persistent endeavour a perpetual reaching out for an ideal an unflagging upward movement along the intellectual and spiritual planes. It is a double process of acquirement and abandonment. As man goes forward along the path of progress he should shed the frailties and the evils that hamper him and tend to drag him down to a lower level. And with every onward step he should acquire fresh strength strength of character strength of purpose strength to resist and overcome evil. Mark now the progress of the race. Modern civilization has doubtless added to the material possessions of man. Many inventions of science have revolutionised the conditions of modern life. Distance is no bar to the rapidity of travel or swiftness of communication. On the other hand the primitive savage and fierce instincts of man have developed at an alarming rate. The blood lust is fiercer than ever and the resources of science have been explored to invent instruments of wholesale slaughter. In earlier times a battle or a war was decided by the loss of a few thousand lives and the sacking of a few towns. Now when the height of civilization has been reached a war may

involve millions of life and the ruthless destruction of large cities and historical landmarks of architecture. Compared with modern warfare the ravages of a Zulu impi were child's play. It is no longer a battle between two armed hosts, but the blind dealing of wholesale death from a distance, blending in one red ruin the armed and the unarmed, peaceful civilians, defenceless women and children. Death leaps out from the bowels of the earth and rushes up from the bottom of the sea, it drops from the sky and comes crashing from long distances.

Has man any reason to be gratified by these triumphs of civilization? Earth hunger, or the desire of founding an empire, is keener than in ancient times. The dream of settling international differences by arbitration still remains a dream. The contradictions in human nature are becoming more emphasised as time goes on. Nations that have won liberty and prize freedom above everything else do not feel the slightest hesitation in depriving other peoples of their liberty. Now, as in ancient times, the strong domineer over the weak and every issue between two nations results in a trial of strength. In the abstract, no ambition can be finer than the yearning for nationalism. Every nation has an unquestionable right to grow to its full stature and to attain to freedom. But is there any instance in history in which any nation has rested content with the status of a free and independent nation? A free, self-contained and strong nation may be expected to remain at peace with its neighbours and the world. But freedom once won and strength consolidated, a nation proceeds forthwith to deprive other nations of their freedom and launches on a career of conquest. It may hold off its hands from a strong neighbour, but will go far afield for the acquisition of fresh territory and the conquest of weaker peoples. Man himself violates at every step the law that he lays down for his guidance. He denies to others what he himself strives most to attain, and the nations which have regarded liberty as their

proudest possession have never tired of seizing the liberty and lands of other nations

What is the main defect of the human character that retards the progress and real evolution of the race? It is unquestionably man's pride arrogance vanity, the sense of superiority and the egoism that never desert him for a moment. A fine distinction has been made between what is regarded as the higher quality of pride and the lower one of vanity but it is really a distinction without a difference for in either case it gives man an exaggerated notion of his importance and invests him with a superiority to which he has no real claim. It has been wisely and wittily observed that conceit is to human nature as salt is to the sea no one knows how it came there no one knows how to eliminate it¹ It is no more possible to eradicate conceit from human nature than to sweeten the saline waters of the sea. Can the analogy be pushed further and can it be asserted that as salt has existed in the sea since the creation of the world so pride has existed in human nature ever since the creation of man? Perhaps it is so perhaps pride is of later growth and has grown with the other foibles of the human character. But the instinct of vanity is not very far removed from the primitive man as also from the highly civilized. The North American Indian brave on the war path was as vain of his war paint and aureole of feathers as Beau Brummell in all his glory was vain of his clothes and his wig. The hideous and disfiguring ornaments of savage women owe their origin to the same instinct that produces the latest Paris fashions. This vanity has been rebuked by the highest and greatest teachers of humanity with very little effect. Let us concede to proceed with the argument that pride is a higher quality than vanity. The proudest race of men were probably the Romans. When a Roman said *Romanus sum* I am a Roman he uttered a sentiment of

10 W. Holmes *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*

the highest pride. But even in their pride all Romans were not equal, for the patricians looked down upon the plebians with undisguised disdain. What may be pride in one man may become vanity in another, and the two forms of weakness really overlap each other.

If the pride of man were confined to great deeds or remarkable achievements, there might be some excuse for it although even then it would not be justifiable. A man of genius, a great writer, orator, or statesman, a successful man of business, a victorious general, the founder of an empire, may think he has just cause for pride, but the humiliating and impartial irony of inconsistency in human nature makes man proud not only of his virtues but of his vices as well. If a successful writer is proud of his fame, a successful and much-sought-after burglar—sought by the police—is equally proud of his notoriety. The card-sharper is proud of his dishonest winnings, the voluptuary gloats over his vices. The causes of pride may be different but the nature of the feeling is the same. Men who are good or great should refuse to share such a feeling with the wicked and the depraved, for it places both on the same level, but this failing is common to all humanity just as the sea all over the world is impregnated with salt.

What shall we say of the insolence that makes one human race despise another, the pride of colour or the absence of colour, the contumely of caste, the daily ignoring of the accepted fact that all men have one Maker? What race has been influenced by the teaching that all men are brothers and equals? Pride, as the imagination of man has well conceived, was the cause of the downfall of the most powerful archangel from his high estate, but with equal truth it may be said mournfully of man: How art thou fallen, Lucifer, Son of the Morning!

And yet the mind falters in closing the outlook of the human race on a note of despondency. We have in view humanity in the aggregate, for individuals may have won their

emancipation from the frailties besetting the human race. On a dispassionate and careful consideration it is undeniable that so far as his failings and defects are concerned man has been dragging a lengthening chain through the many thousands of years that he has moved on this earth. What he has gained in one direction he has more than lost in another and the balance now weighs heavily against him. Nevertheless the faith that is begotten of hope is in us and we are reluctant to believe that man has achieved the best of which he is capable and he can rise no higher. Who can tell what the future near or remote may bring? We are after all creatures of little faith and less vision. It may be that at some future time unforeseen by man there may be a mighty moral upheaval shaking human nature to the roots. The chain that fetters him may snap and man may stand forth truly free--free not from the yoke of another but from the more insidious and more demoralising bondage of self the chain that does not fret the flesh but holds the spirit in thrall the shackles of pride the clanking chain of superiority. And so light of heart and step and alert of eye man may march forward to the fulfilment of his destiny ere his race be run.

For the one immutable law of creation is that nothing shall endure for ever and everything that has a beginning must have an end. *Multiples of life may last longer than individual life* but the race perishes as certainly as the individual and in the eternity of time no hour glass marks the passing of æons. Early types of the human race are as extinct as the dodo. Where are the Egyptians with their lost secret of embalming the dead and rearing the Pyramids? The ancient Greeks with their fully equipped intellect the flower of their superb manhood and the matchless beauty and grace of their maidens the Romans with their victorious legions and eagles their unequalled pride and achievement the Aryans with their boundless wisdom and their dauntless quest for the truth have all vanished. We recall with wonder and admiration those early

stalwarts of the human race, the warrior caste of the Aryans and the vikings of Scandinavia, men with magnificent brawn and brains, whose peers can no longer be seen. As they have passed, so will other races pass and yet others will follow until the human race will have lived out its destined length of life.

Science has taught us of dead stars whose light detached from the source is still travelling through space. With a star die the lesser bodies revolving round it and deriving their life from it. A time may come when the sun, the centre and light and life of the solar system, may flicker out like a rushlight blown out by the wind, and simultaneously all life will cease on the planets, which, released from the power which keeps them in their orbits, will hurtle through space and dissolve into the elemental atoms that called them into being. A convulsion of even such a colossal magnitude will leave the order of the universe undisturbed, and no ripple will be caused in the immensity of space by the wreckage of the solar system. The law fulfils itself both ways by the act of cohesion and creation and the process of disintegration and dissolution.

Time is thus an element that cannot be left out of consideration in the evolution of the human race. Man has not got all time at his disposal for the attainment of his highest development. If he were less satisfied with what he has achieved and more conscious of his failings, he would find himself on the right path to the attainment of his goal. He needs strength not to usurp what belongs to another, but to subdue the evil in himself. He needs humility not studied or worn as a garment, but innate, unconscious, pure and fragrant as a flower. Development by antagonism will not bring about the salvation of the race, for it will strengthen the passions and pride of man so that his foot will slip at every step on the upward path of progress. It is by elimination, the plucking out by the roots of the baser part of his dual nature that man can emancipate himself and terminate the servitude of self. Let us cherish the hope—it

may be only a dream—that in the fulness of time out of the surge and swirl of circumstance will emerge a race clean limbed and clean minded self contained and self restrained with power over itself and over evil perfect in moral discipline purged of the baser instincts that taint human nature full of gentleness and full of thought reverent towards all life in creation compassionate tolerant plumbing the mystery of being with unerring precision Then will man truly become—not the lord of creation for that is an arrogant phrase but the perfect symbol the bloom and fragrance of the efflorescence of creation

ART IN THE WEST AND THE EAST

ART IN THE WEST AND THE EAST

I.

IN the mythology of ancient Greece the Muses are represented by a sisterhood of nine divinities, whose favourite haunts were Mount Helicon and Mount Parnassus, and who presided over and cherished various arts. Five of them had different forms of poetry in their keeping. Singing and harmony and dancing claimed the ministrations of two others, while history and astronomy were looked after by the remaining two. But such fine arts as painting and sculpture and architecture were left to look after themselves without the inspiring guardianship of any of the Muses. On the other hand, the ancient Aryan mythology of India namea a single tutelary goddess, Sarasvati, of the arts. She is pictured as a standing figure with her feet gracefully and lightly poised on a lotus flower, which is symbolical and suggestive of a whole world of art, and holding in her hands the *vina*, the famous stringed instrument emblematic not merely of music but also of harmony, which is the essence of all art. Since all art, imaginative, creative and formative, has the same spring and its various expressions proceed from a common source, the conception of a single inspiring divinity is an appropriate one. There is such striking similarity between Aryan and Greek mythologies that there can be little doubt that they were the common inheritance of an ancient people which divided east and west on the adventure of life, and while the Aryans in India concentrated on the evolution of the spirit and scaled the heights of the Upanishads, the Aryans in Greece became the greatest artists and warriors in the world and no mean rivals to their distant cousins

in literature and philosophy. But in religion they made no advance beyond the faith they had brought with them.

Of the four Vedas the Sama Veda is most highly praised because it consists of chants or songs of praise. In the Bhagavadgita Sri Krishna says among the Vedas I am the Sama Veda. Sarasvati is represented as the essence of the Sama Veda. The earliest and the greatest artist is the poet who in the ancient times merely chanted his poems. Some of the greatest poems were composed before any script and writing materials were known. Early poetry was mnemonic and the verses flowed out of the lips of the poet as clear water gushes out from a spring. It was a spontaneous outpouring and the listeners committed the verses to memory. This is the fashion in which the Aryan scriptures and poetry were preserved for a long time. Similarly singing must have been known and practised long before musical instruments came into use. Men and women must have sung even as the birds sing for the pure joy of singing.

Every other form of art must be of later origin. The cave man had enough to do in satisfying his primitive instincts. He had no house to decorate, no walls on which to hang pictures. Still the instinct of art is as ancient as the primitive man and prehistoric paintings and engravings have been discovered in ancient cave-dwellings. Decorative and pictorial art has been traced back to the time of Menes, the first king of Egypt (5500 B.C.) and it must have been in existence even earlier. Even the pigments have not lost their brightness and the beautiful Egyptian blue may be still admired while the motives of decorations may be easily identified. It is inferred that painting as it is now understood was not known to the Egyptians but as a matter of fact easel and portable paintings cannot be preserved for very long. The sacred scarabs, the vultures, the human figures, the wall-decorations of the tombs, the paintings on the mummy cases indicate a length of life that fills the beholder with amazement apart altogether from the artistic

merits of the decorations. The thrill that was created by the opening of the tomb of King Tutankhamen in the valley of the Tombs of the Kings at Luxor, which occupies the site of the 'hundred-gated' Thebes, has not yet altogether subsided. The marvellous objects discovered within the royal tomb are a substantial addition to the world's knowledge of Egyptian art. The golden chariot, the wonderful vases, the heads of the typhonic animals forming the framework of the royal couch, are finished works of art and were placed in the sepulchre more than three thousand years ago. Paintings found on the funerary equipment in the tomb show remarkable progress in that art, while there are spirited pictures of hunting scenes showing the young king and queen. In one picture the young queen has accompanied her husband to a duck-shoot and is handing him an arrow and also pointing out a duck with the other hand. In the sterner chase of the lion and other big game the king is represented driving in his chariot drawn by fiery horses, accompanied by his great slughi hounds and his followers in the distance. The most valuable treasure found inside the coffin itself is a magnificent manuscript, the first *Royal Book of the Dead*, consisting of a papyrus roll, over 100 feet long, and 'embellished with hundreds of paintings in colour by Egypt's greatest artists in her supreme period of decorative art.' Egypt alone knew the art of preserving the dead and embalming the flesh and the bones that begin to putrefy a few hours after death in such fashion that the mummies may be seen to this day retaining the resemblance to living humanity. It is a lost art well lost, for the heart is filled with a great pity when one thinks of this manner of disposing of the dead. Here was a great people now extinct, possessed of an ancient civilization, much wealth and many arts. Yet the Egyptians knew very little about the higher phases of religion and did not realise that the human body is like a cage in which the soul tarries, and when the spirit is fled this tenement of flesh is like an empty cage from which the bird

has escaped. The poor ignorant Egyptians provided for the dead as for the living with meat and wine, chariot, chair and couch, their thoughts being unable to travel beyond this world. And then one thinks of another ancient people who thought deeper and whose faith was truer and higher, who believed that the flesh is composed of the five elements and should mingle with them after death, who consigned the dead to the flames and scattered the ashes to the winds of heaven. The embalming and preservation of dead human bodies appear all the more inexplicable in view of the tradition about the phoenix, the fabulous Egyptian bird reputed to visit the temple dedicated to it at Heliopolis every 500 years, and which rose every time as a new phoenix from its own ashes.

The history of Chaldean and Assyrian art is written in the fragments that have been recovered by archaeologists by excavating the ruined cities of Babylon and Nineveh, opposite the modern Mosul, while part of the political history of Assyria has been traced by deciphering the cuneiform inscriptions on tombs, monuments and other remnants of monumental architecture. Assyrian painting and decoration have been found on glazed bricks and stucco and sculptured slabs. There is evidence that Nineveh imitated and adopted the art of Babylonia, though the Assyrians were superior to the Chaldeans in sculpture. The winged bulls of Nineveh, the great alabaster figures half man and half bull or lion, that formed the portals of palaces, the beautiful positive and negative colours on the walls of Ninevite palaces, are triumphs of high art. The sculptures and bas-reliefs are rich in figures and fantastic creations. The Greek historian Philostratus has given a vivid description of the palaces of the Kings of Babylon covered with burnished bronze that glittered at a distance, and the opulence of silver and beaten and even massive gold that decorated the chambers and porticoes. It was in one of these palaces that Belshazzar, the last of the Kings of Babylon, made a great feast and commanded that the golden and silver vessels from

the temple in Jerusalem, taken out by his father Nebuchadnezzar, should be brought forth so that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink wine therein.' And as they drank they praised their gods made of precious and base metals, wood and stone. In that same fateful hour, we read in the Book of Daniel, 'came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote.' Neither the revellers, nor the astrologers, the Chaldeans and the soothsayers, could explain the meaning of the words written on the wall, and hence Daniel was called to interpret them, and he interpreted them as the divine judgment pronounced upon Belshazzar, the king, since he had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. That same night the king was slain and Darius the Median took the kingdom. The writing is ever the same on the palace walls of kingdoms and empires, but there are no eyes to see and no Daniel to interpret it. As it was in the past, so it is in the present, and so will it be in the future. The decree never varies: God numbers every kingdom, and finishes it when it is weighed and found wanting; and it is divided and given to others. As it was with Babylon, so was it with the Aryan kingdoms and Buddhist Empire in India, Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome and the Moghul Empire; and so it has been now with China, Russia, Germany and Austria. And as to the future, it is not given to us to lift the veil. The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on to other palace walls.

Unlike the vanished kingdoms of ancient Mesopotamia, Persia has had a more or less continuous history of art, of which the individuality has been maintained, though the country itself has been invaded and conquered by other nations. It has influenced several industrial arts of Europe and the East. 'The Lion's Frieze' found in the ruins of the ancient Persian palace at Susa is a piece of the finest sculpture. Under such kings as

Cambyases Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes ancient Persia attained a magnificence which has probably never been rivalled. The palaces at Persepolis, Susa and Ecbatana eclipsed everything known before, and were vast treasure houses of art. Ancient Greek writers not unnaturally wrote lightly of Persian conquests and riches but archaeological researches have proved that the Greek accounts underestimated the extent of Persian achievement. In the Book of Esther there is an accurate account of the royal feast given by the King Ahasuerus the Xerxes of history unto all the people that were present at Shushan the palace, in the court of the garden where were white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another) and royal wine in abundance according to the state of the King.¹ Great and small were alike bidden to this feast which lasted for seven days. If this was the court of the garden what must have been the interior of the palace like?

It has been observed that of all the nations of the world, living or dead the ancient Greeks and the Japanese, both ancient and modern can alone be regarded as nations of artists. The Greeks cultivated physical beauty as a thing of art and they were the finest looking race that the world has seen. Up to this day a man with a fine head and handsome regular features is compared to a Greek or the statue of a Greek god. Pictures of beautiful gods and goddesses were suspended in bedrooms so that men and women might behold them the last thing at night and their eyes might rest on them the first thing on awakening in the morning. Women wore gold chains round their knees so that they might walk with measured and graceful

¹ James Ward *History and Methods of Ancient and Modern Painting*. Some statements of facts are also taken from this book.

steps. And this national love of the artistic and the beautiful translated itself in their unsurpassable creations of art. It may be doubted how long the Japanese will be able to retain their claims as a nation of artists, since they have been drawn into the maelstrom of western materialism. Surface painting being the most quickly perishable form of art no remains of Greek painting are to be found, but there is historical record that the Greeks painted on walls, panels and canvases, and the names of certain schools of paintings, such as the Ionic and the Sicyonian, are still known. We know that Apelles, the court painter of Alexander the Great and called the Prince of Painters, was a great artist. The name of his most celebrated painting is known, but the picture itself is not in existence. There are Greek books giving accounts of large paintings on the walls of public buildings and other movable pictures. What significance would the name of Homer have conveyed to the world today if the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* had perished? And in his own time the greatest epic poet of Europe, reputed to have been a wandering minstrel, was a man of so little consequence that practically nothing is known about him, his birth-place is unknown and his date is put anywhere between 1100 and 700 B.C. And yet Homer was the greatest of all the artists of Greece. To read the names and description of pictures that are extinct, is like finding a commentary on some famous book of which the text is lost. Even so late as the last century, Ruskin wrote that he never intended to republish *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* because the book had become useless on account of the buildings described in it having been either knocked down 'or scraped and patched up into smugness and smoothness more tragic than uttermost ruin.' And in this century German cannon have irretrievably ruined the famous Cathedral of Rheims.

In architecture, sculpture, designing and painting Greece reached the summit of excellence in the classic period. The aim, whether in statuary or other forms of figure representa-

tion was the perfection of human beauty in both sexes and the figures of the gods and goddesses were the highest expression of such beauty. The figure of the Greek god Apollo was the ideal embodiment of the most perfect and the most glorious manhood. The most celebrated works of Phidias who is designated the greatest sculptor of Greece and therefore of the world were the colossal statues of Athene and the Olympian Zeus the latter being considered his masterpiece. The human ideal was never transcended and the inspiration of the Greek artists was the conception of the physical ideal of manhood and womanhood. The figure of the Sphinx in Egypt is a much older monument and it may not possess the embellishments of the highest Greek art but it fills a larger place in the imagination of the world than any statue of Greece and Rome. The strange fable associated with the name the famous riddle which Œdipus solved and the mystery of the Sphinx have all been worked into the immense rock-cut figure that dominates the landscape in the vicinity of the Pyramids. The figure partially resembles the fabled monster the body and paws are those of a lion the face and breast those of a woman but the beholder perceives nothing grotesque at all so impressive is the face in its calm dignity so overpowering is the whole figure in its sovereign power. It still stands as the riddle of the ages mystic inscrutable tranquil powerful.

From the remains that are still left of the achievements of the art of Greece some idea may be formed of what Hellas must have been in the height of her glory. The traveller the artist and the archæologist may still gaze on what is left of the Acropolis the Temple of Victory and the Parthenon. The Theseum the ancient temple of Theseus with some modern renovations is still entire. Hellenic art has exercised a potent influence just as Greek literature and Greek philosophy have permeated Europe.

Though independent of origin early Roman art inevitably came under the influence of Hellenistic art which left its firm

impress on the Augustan period. The Emperor Augustus was the patron of all art, and the most striking monument intended to glorify him was the *Ara Pacis Augusti*—the Altar of Peace of Augustus. The reliefs of the *Ara* are historical portraits of great importance. The occasion selected was when the Imperial House and the highest aristocracy of Rome accompanied the Emperor when he made the first sacrifice at the altar. 'Priests and officials, proud youth, beautiful women and well-bred children,' servants, sacrificial animals, fruits, garlands, are all represented with great skill and dignity of treatment. A German writer holds the view that the 'world-propelling genius of Augustan art was not a sculptor but the poet Vergil.'¹ At a later period Latin art freed itself as an original national art. Under the Emperors Titus and Trajan Roman art established its individuality. The Coliseum and the Arch of Titus, the historical sculptures of the time of Trajan, the fully developed arch of Roman architecture, the cupola of the Pantheon built under Hadrian, surpassed the products of previous arts. Latin art was particularly strong in portraiture, and the beautiful and varied Roman busts have never been rivalled. And like Greece, Rome has given to the world a literature which will endure when her triumphs in stone and marble will have disappeared. By a strange irony, the volcanic eruption which destroyed all life in the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, left the art treasures of those cities in a state of perfect preservation, and the removal of the incrustation of lava has enabled the world to realise that 'the decorative art on the wall spaces at Pompeii, the work of Greek artists, has never been equalled or excelled.'²

As the mind's eye roams over the past, the solemn question comes unbidden: Where are the palaces of the Pharaohs of Egypt, the gilded chambers of Cleopatra, the dazzling edifices

¹ Franz Wickhoff: *Roman Art*.

² James Ward: *History of Painting*.

of Babylon and Nineveh the vast mansions of unparalleled magnificence in Persepolis and Susa, the proud structures of granite and marble, bronze gold and silver that lifted up their heads as a challenge to eternity? Time, the great obliterator has passed his sponge over them, and, lo! they have vanished even like the palace raised in a night by the genius of Aladdin's lamp. And Earth, the great Mother and the final resting place of all, has hidden the ruins away out of sight in her own wide and deep bosom. The dead are sometimes better housed than the living the Pyramids, the most massive structures of antiquity, and the Taj Mahal the most exquisite creation of mediæval art are houses of the dead. Tutankhamen's grave has been found, who can point out the ruins of the palace in which he lived?

The transition from pagan Rome to Christian Italy corresponded with the decline and fall of Rome and the disappearance of ancient Roman art. In early Christian art, in which the strong influence of the form and technique of Roman art is obvious figure decoration was avoided on account of the antipathy to heathenism and pagan gods. The fierce denunciations of some of the Hebrew prophets against Babylonian and other gods fill part of the Old Testament. As, however the prohibition against the making of images is not confined to the Bible, the aspects of prohibition in art among different peoples may be considered together. In the Aryan scriptures there is nothing mentioned but no Indo-Aryan artist ever thought of making an image of the Brahman, the God of the Upanishads. Even the Puranic divinities were not represented by figures for a considerable time. Buddhist sculptors and imagers in the time of Asoka illustrated in reliefs and paintings the many incarnations of the Buddha as told in the Avadanas and the Jataka tales but not one of them ventured to make a figure of the Blessed One. Probably the first images of the Buddha were made under the Kushan Kings in the north western part of India and King Kanishka was a

great patron of art. Of the two divisions of Buddhism, Mahayana and Hinayana, the Hinayana sect has been always opposed to any visible likeness of the Tathagata. In the Old Testament there is an emphatic prohibitory mandate in the Second Commandment. There were to be no other gods before God, and all images and likenesses, graven or otherwise, for worship were forbidden. Before the Exodus Moses had seen the gods of Egypt. The obedience to the commandment was not always absolute, for there was a bronze figure of the serpent in the Temple of Jerusalem itself, but when Israel was at the height of its power, and the supremacy of the Synagogue was undisputed for nearly a thousand years, all relics and traces of the ancient formative art were destroyed. The iconoclastic zeal appeared among some of the converted Romans also. In the eighth century, Leo the Isaurian, known as the 'Iconoclast,' was Emperor of the Eastern Empire, and he issued an edict against the supposed worship of images, and this edict was confirmed by a council of bishops. The production of sacred sculpture, certain forms of mosaics and monumental paintings, was prohibited, and many valuable works of art were destroyed. Leo burned the library at Constantinople containing above 30,000 volumes and a quantity of medals. The Prophet of Arabia was born among a race of idol-worshippers, and his hatred of idols and images may be easily understood. On his return to Mecca after the Hejira at Medina, all the idols in the Caaba were destroyed. In the Koran the commandment is, "Verily, God will not forgive the union of other gods with himself!"¹ The interpretation was that not only should the followers of Islam have nothing to do with images, but these should be destroyed wherever found. This is the explanation of the irrational and furious iconoclasm which destroyed or disfigured most of the sculptures in India and burned many thousands of pictures and

¹ The Koran, Sura IV.

palm leaf manuscripts. The effect on several branches of art so far as the Saracenic world is concerned has been complete sterility. It reminds one of a single potent German word displayed on the highways and by ways of Germany when the junkers swaggered along the streets and before the Kaiser and his entourage had bolted like rabbits to their new found warren in Holland. *Verboten*—not allowed. It is not permissible for a Mussalman ruler to stamp his effigy upon his coins. No artist in the ranks of the Faithful may become a sculptor. Saracenic architecture rigidly eschews all figures even of birds and animals. Persia had a tradition of art before it was converted to Islam and consequently all secular art could not be summarily abolished from that country. Besides the Sufis regard Mansoor who proclaimed *Un al Huq* (I am God) and was condemned to death as one of their most spiritual leaders who had attained the fourth or highest stage of Sufism. This doctrine of the identity of the soul with God became a recognised factor in Persian thought and Persian poetry. One hardly knows whether Moghul painting in India was introduced surreptitiously or openly but the Emperors under whom it most flourished Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan had not the zeal of Leo or Kala Pahar. But the ban under which figure representation is placed does not apply to the inscription on the Dewan-i-Am of the palace in Delhi in which it is emphatically repeated three times that the Hall of Audience is Elysium on earth.

The apprehension that the use of figures in Christian art would tend to encourage idolatrous worship was not of long duration. It was found that pictorial representations of scriptural subjects and personages would help the spread of Christianity and the ban on the portrayal of figures was removed. For some time the classic ideals filled the imagination of the artists. Sometimes the Christ was represented by the figure of Orpheus with his lyre and surrounded by animals. The early Christian churches were

filled with mosaic decorations of a high order. In the earlier mosaics there was no nimbus round the head of the Christ. Even so late as the sixteenth century the mosaic decorations of a church in Rome, designed by Raphael, were curiously mixed. Numerous Greek deities are represented with a figure of the Creator surrounded by angels. Christian iconography had an early beginning, and the icon is an established fetish among the followers of the Greek Church. The mosaicists were succeeded by the frescanti of Italy. Wall-painting in fresco was used in Greek and Roman art. Even in Italy the colours have disappeared from many fresco paintings and only the outlines are left.

Illuminated manuscripts and the painting of miniatures is also an ancient art. The oldest illuminated manuscript in existence is probably the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, written and decorated on papyri leaves, and made for Ani about 1500 B.C., but this view will have to be altered after the discovery of the *Royal Book of the Dead* in the coffin of Tutankhamen. There are fragments of the *Iliad* with miniatures painted on vellum. The famous Paris Psalter, the Irish Celtic *Books of the Gospels and Psalters* and the famous *Book of Kells* in Trinity College, Dublin, are all works of a delicate and beautiful art.

So bewildering is the conflict of opinion about the great complex movement of the Renaissance, specially in Italy, that it seems difficult to decide whether the world has gained or lost by this remarkable awakening, and whether the evil of it preponderates over the good. And yet there is no dubiousness about it at all. The revival of the influence of classic art could not eliminate the new force that had appeared in all thought, all literature, all art. Pre-Renaissance and mid-Renaissance art is informed with the image and passion of the Christ, of infinite sorrow and infinite grace, the marvel of the Nativity, the suffering at Calvary and the glory of the Ascension. The Renaissance was ushered in by Dante and

Petrarch and it was borne past on the river of Time to the accompaniment of the swan song of Tasso. What glorious chapters of art are associated with the names of Titian, Michaelangelo and Raphael! So irresistible was the haunting fascination of Leonardo's Mona Lisa that it resulted in the picture being stolen. Ruskin rightly called Michaelangelo the Homer of painting. With equal truth he has been called the prophet of classical revivalism. One of the greatest of the great Florentines, warrior sculptor, the greatest frescoist of all time, Michaelangelo alone would have shed an undying lustre on the Renaissance in Italy and the highest traditions of art. And Michaelangelo wrote sonnets. But he was one even if the greatest one out of many dazzling luminaries in the firmament of art. What other name can be associated with Raphael as an equal? In his short life of thirty-seven years he gave to the world all that is noblest and sublimest in Christian art with its perfect treatment of colours. The laurels on the brow of Titian will never pass to another and his idylls, landscapes and figures still represent the supreme attainment of art. If the fame of these artists had not overshadowed that of others, there would have been more general recognition of the place of Italy in the Renaissance. Masters like Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Perugino and Tintoretto, if they had been born in other countries, would have won great fame for the lands of their birth. From the meridian reached by Raphael and Michaelangelo the passage of Italian art to the western horizon was swift. It was like a fall from a dizzy summit to the depths below. The process of erosion had been going on in the social influences, in the pride, luxury and hypocrisy of high life. Pontiffs like Sixtus IV and Alexander Borgia had fouled the very fountain head of the Christian Church. No pagan or heathen of legend or myth, no ruffian in the history of criminology has rivalled the horrors attributed to the Borgias. Vice flaunted itself openly and unashamed, corrupt patrons corrupted literature.

and art. The art that had reached a standard of excellence which could not be maintained, soon died out. Criticism outside Italy has noted the fact that Rome, the home of classic greatness, has twice been the tomb of art. The birth-place is the death-place of most things, but Italy has achieved what no other country in the world has done, for she has produced two literatures and two arts which rank among the highest in the world. Pagan Rome still dominates Europe with her culture, literature and ambition. Christianity has produced no law-maker to supersede the laws of Rome, and the Roman law is still the ideal in England. After the fall of ancient Rome a mixed race appeared in Italy, and the Roman disappeared in the Italian, who has also made his mark both as a poet and a painter. Nor is the book of Italian achievement yet closed, for the present holds the promise of another great future.

Painting has been named the Sister of Poetry. If so, the classic and Renaissance periods represent the epic age in art. The Renaissance in France and Flanders and the rise of the Dutch School have an important bearing upon art in North Europe. The Flemish artists Hubert and Jan Van Eyck are reputed to be the inventors of the oil medium in painting, but the use of drying oils was known before them. In England such great portraitists as Lely, Reynolds and Gainsborough appeared in the eighteenth century. Hogarth occupies a place by himself as one of the greatest satirists of the vices and weaknesses of the world. The English school of the nineteenth century produced several artists of genius. To Turner, the landscape-painter, belongs the distinction of being the central figure of the five volumes written by Ruskin on 'Modern Painters.' Indignant at the ignorant criticism by which the great painter was assailed, Ruskin, who was then a mere boy, wrote a vigorous reply which was the beginning of his great book.

While the classic art of Europe may be designated epic, historical pictures in marble and on canvas may be rightly

called the dramatic phase of art while dainty miniatures are really lyrics in colours. The evolution of art has been from idealism to realism. The classic art of Greece was nourished on Homer and Hesiod. Greek children were taught by heart passages from these poets and the boys also learned choral odes, popular songs and hymns. Memory training was cultivated by the Greek Aryans as carefully as by the Indo Aryans. The Greek artist aimed at reproducing the type and not the individual. The gods and goddesses were not painted or sculptured from living models but from the artists' ideal conception of beauty and manliness. Similarly in Christian art the Virgin, the Christ and scriptural traditions were subjective creations of the genius of the artist. No likeness of Jesus Christ was ever taken in his lifetime and it would have been sacrilegious to draw his image from any living man. All artists endeavoured to idealise the Jewish type of features and countenance. Guido Reni's *Ecce Homo* with the crown of thorns and the agony in the upturned eyes is one of the most popular figures of the Christ sublime in its suffering. Raphael and Michaelangelo did portraits but their greatest works were not made from life. Michaelangelo's paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican representing scenes from the Old Testament are unapproachable in their grandeur but not a single figure is a portrait. Modern painting is mostly portraiture while the ateliers in Paris and the studios in other capitals are haunted by artists' models. The modern tendency is towards profane or secular art and inspiration is not often sought from the poets or sacred literature. A writer¹ to whom reference has been made says 'formative art often limps but slowly after the swift imagination of the poet. And the poet still draws wonderful pictures in a few lines as vividly and unerringly as the painter on canvas or paper. Take the following example from Tenny

¹ Franz Wackhoff

son's *The Passing of Arthur*, where the funeral barge comes to take away the dying King:—

“ Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stem,
Beneath them ; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold : and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.”

Ghostly, weird and haunting, yet noble in its setting of grief, this is a picture as clear to the vision of the mind as it would be to the eye if limned by a great painter.

II

EUROPEAN writers in their references to Eastern art usually draw the line at Byzantium or Persia. Some writers have traced an affinity between Roman and Japanese arts. The Land of the Chrysanthemum and the geisha has had a strong fascination for European travellers and holiday seekers but no attempt was made to ascertain the indebtedness of Japanese and Chinese art to the ancient art of India. Much of the annals of Indo Aryan civilization is pre historic but not mythic. History as such was never written by the Aryans and their wisdom in this respect is justified by the doubtful truthfulness of many historical records. These ancient people in India recorded their thoughts on the tablets of their memory. So thoroughly saturated were their minds with a profound conviction of the illusory nature of the objective world the evanescence of all worldly things and the transience of kingdoms and empires that neither dates nor history had any interest for them. The Hebrew Preacher said Vanity of vanities all is vanity. This is an obvious truth but to the Aryans in India it was deep and real philosophy colouring all thought and governing every action in life. The original meaning of the Sanskrit word *itihasa* now translated as history is tradition and in this sense the great epics the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and several of the ancient Sanskrit dramas are historical. Cities like Ayodhya Indraprastha and Hastinapur were not poetic inventions. Among the ruins around Delhi a mound of earth is still known as the site of Indraprastha frequently named in the Mahabharata. In the same epic a detailed account is given of a splendid Assembly Hall built for the Pandava Princes¹. Architecture is the earliest form of formative and decorative art. It is mentioned that the hall was ornamented with many pictures and the floor

¹ The Mahabharata Sabha Parva

was so cunningly devised that it produced an optical delusion. The famous *Rishi* Narada, who was present as an honoured guest, gave King Yudhishtira elaborate descriptions of the assembly halls of some of the gods. In the *Mrichchhakatikam* (Toy Cart), believed to be the oldest Sanskrit drama and supposed to have been written a hundred years before Christ, there is a minute and full account of seven chambers in the mansion of Vasantasena, the heroine. A man who has entered the house for the first time gives a description, beginning with the portico, of the various pictures and ornaments in the rooms. In the *Meghadutam*, or the Cloud Messenger, of the poet Kalidasa, there is a wonderful, panoramic description of landscape, such as would be seen from an aeroplane sailing slowly over the country. Miniature paintings and likenesses from which an individual could be at once recognised are mentioned in the Puranas, dramas, and other works.

Beyond these records there are no remnants, no ruins, no fragments of Indo-Aryan art of the Vedic or epic period, or even of the time of Vikramaditya, the patron of the famous nine intellectual gems, of whom the poet Kalidasa was the most brilliant, the promulgator of one of the two eras now in vogue in India. There is a wide gap of time between pre-historic Indo-Aryan culture and the remains of sculptural and other arts which are found at the present time. No real broad-minded lover or critic of art in the West, of either the traditions or remnants of art in India, had any opportunity of observation or study in the early period of British rule in India. Attention was first drawn to the evidences of Brahmanic and Buddhist art by departmental Anglo-Indian writers, whose attitude of ill-disguised contempt towards the past of India was emphasised by their ignorance. Departmental archaeologists and antiquarians could not forget that they belonged to a race which now rules India, and the sense of superiority obscured their judgment. Pronounced scepticism and even denial of the great antiquity of the Vedas, utter ignorance of

Aryan philosophy and literature and the contempt for a race of heathens influenced their pronouncements upon the relics of Indian art. From the sculptures of the Gandharan school admittedly the work of inferior Græco-Roman artists and artisans official English archæologists rushed to the conclusion that India never had any original art and everything was borrowed from ancient Persia Greece or Rome. With a little more ingenuity these critics might have urged that Aryan mythology is borrowed from the Greek that Krishna is merely an imitation of the Greek Orpheus that the Mahabharata is a clever plagiarism from Homer and to complete the *reductio ad absurdum*, it may be maintained with a sovereign contempt for chronological sequence that the doctrine of maya must have been borrowed from Berkeley!

High above these punchbeck professors of art and brummagem archæologists stands John Ruskin whose voice is heard as that of a preacher and prophet in his immortal books and of whom no one can speak without admiration and reverence. Ruskin himself wrote that he had seen every stone of Venice but of Indian art he had seen nothing beyond the careless and unrepresentative collection of worthless modern work scattered about in the British and South Kensington Museums. The great writer had never heard of the sculptures of Elephanta and Ellora the paintings of Ajanta and the works of Indian art in Ceylon and Java. The poor specimens that he saw he designated as barbarous grotesque of mere savageness as seen in the work of Hindoo and other Indian nations.¹ The still more grosser form of the barbarous grotesque was to be found among the complete savage of the Pacific Islands. Thus in the opinion of Ruskin the Hindoo and other Indian nations were only one degree removed from the complete savage and the cannibal. In another place treating of architecture and referring to India

¹ Ruskin *The Stones of Venice* Vol. III

Ruskin makes a curiously infelicitous suggestion about keeping the lamp of memory alight:—"Let us imagine our own India House adorned in this way, by historical or symbolical sculpture: massively built in the first place; then adorned with bas-reliefs of our Indian battles, and fitted with carvings of Oriental foliage, or inlaid with Oriental stones; and the more important members of its decoration composed of groups of Indian life and landscape, and prominently expressing the phantasms of Hindoo worship in their subjection to the Cross."¹ If this idea had been carried out and a building of the India Office designed in accordance with these suggestions, it would have been a daily affront to Indian visitors and a monument of political unwisdom. But if Ruskin wrote of Indian art and the Indian people in ignorance, he wrote of the followers of the Church of Rome with full and finished knowledge, and he poured his vial of contempt on 'Romanist idolatry' with burning iconoclastic zeal:—"It matters literally nothing to a Romanist what the image he worships is like. Take the vilest doll that is screwed together in a cheap toy-shop, trust it to the keeping of a large family of children, let it be beaten about the house by them till it is reduced to a shapeless block, then dress it in a satin frock and declare it to have fallen from heaven, and it will satisfactorily answer all Romanist purposes."² Ruskin's literary judgment also is startlingly unconventional:—"Cast Coleridge at once aside, as sickly and useless; and Shelley as shallow and verbose."³

Ruskin was far too great a man to wrangle with his early critics, but once, in the preface to the second edition of *Modern Painters*, he replied to a critic in Blackwood's Magazine, and the first sentence may be quoted here:—"Writers like the present critic of Blackwood's Magazine

¹ *The Seven Lamps of Architecture: The Lamp of Memory.*

² *Stones of Venice*, Vol. II.

³ *Elements of Drawing*, Appendix.

deserve respect—the respect due to honest, hopeless, help less imbecility.” The critic was none other than Professor John Wilson ‘the fair haired Hercules Apollo,’ famous under his literary name of Christopher North. Language of such scathing contempt has not been applied even to the most ignorant critics of Indian art.

The word ‘Hindu’ is from the Persian word ‘Hind,’ meaning black, and refers to the dark complexion of the people of India but it has been accepted latterly by the Hindus themselves as distinctive of their religion. The word ‘Hind’ occurs in the famous *gazel* of Hafiz —

“ *Agar an Toork Shirazi badastarad dile mara,*

Bakhale Hindyush bukhshum Samarcando Bokhara ra

If that Toork from Shiraz would take my heart in his hand I would make a gift of the cities Samarcand and Bokhara in exchange for the dark mole on his skin.” Again, the word is an obvious corruption from the Sanskrit word *Indu*, the moon. The illustrious Chinese traveller Hieuen Tsang who travelled extensively in India says that the country was called in ancient times *Shun tu* (*Sindhu*), also *Hien tau* (*Hindu*), but the right pronunciation of the word is *In tu* (*Indu*). The explanation of this name may be given in the traveller’s own eloquent words — The bright connected light of holy men and sages guiding the world as the shining of the moon have made this country eminent, and so it is called *In tu* (*Indu*), the Moon. It will be more accurate to refer to early Indian art as Brahmanic, Jaina and Buddhist, for the word ‘Hindu’ was unknown until the establishment of Islamic rule in India.

Preconceived prejudice inability to appreciate the orientation of Indian thought and Indian art, utter ignorance of ancient Indian theology as contained in the Sanskrit scriptures and of the hagiology of Buddhism and Jainism and irresponsible empiricism have combined to make supercilious outside estimates of ancient Indian art utterly valueless. But

the appeal here is not that of embalmed mummies and the trappings of death which have turned archæologists into grave-diggers, but of living thought and a profound symbolism. As Indian philosophy and Indian thought have penetrated the thick armour of Western materialism, so has Indian art been vindicated and raised to its rightful place in the world of art. Continental critics like Foucher and Rodin, himself a great artist, the patient and earnest labours of Mrs. Herringham and her Indian helpers, and Victor Goloubeff have represented Indian art in its true light. Havell's works on Indian art and ancient Indian civilization display an insight, an understanding and an intimate knowledge worthy of high admiration, while Coomaraswamy has brought all the resources of his scholarship and all the enthusiasm of his patriotism to bear upon his exposition of Indian and Ceylonese art. And they have been succeeded by others, including a number of Englishmen, who have borne enthusiastic testimony to the greatness of Indian art, which is rapidly winning admirers and adherents in the West.

Time alone is not responsible for the destruction of works of art in India. Almost all vestiges of religious paintings have been effaced by the blind and indiscriminate passion of iconoclastic zeal. In considering the relics of sculptural and architectural arts that are still left, the first feature that has to be stressed is the selection of the sites. With all the modern facilities of travel places like Elephanta, Karle, Ajanta and many ancient temples in South India are not difficult of access now. In ancient times they were entirely removed and remote from the haunts of men, and the men who worked in the cave temples and on rock sculpture lived in a state of complete isolation. The only forethought that they showed was in choosing a spot where there was a supply of fresh water near at hand, a natural spring of clear water, or some mountain stream gushing out near by. In other respects, their abnegation was as complete as of the *yogi* who renounced the world and went to the forest for meditation. It was sacred art

at its highest and holiest. Their studio was the sea girt island or the steep mountain side. There were no admiring crowds to watch their work from day to day, no titles awaiting to reward their labours. It was a work of love, devotion and faith. The Greek sculptor chiselled out his figures or temples from blocks of marble or stone; the Indian sculptor attacked the whole mass of frowning, unyielding and reluctant rock, and with hammer and chisel carved out colossal or small images, magnificent fluted pillars, wide spacious monastic halls. It was the work of Titans done by humble and gentle laymen and monks, whose art was part of their religion. The physical peril was as great as the work was strenuous. The scaffoldings on which the sculptors worked must have been often erected over yawning chasms, and a slip or a false step would have meant instantaneous death. Their indifference to fame was no less remarkable than their disregard of personal comfort and personal safety. There is no inscription, no memorial tablet to afford the slightest clue to the master artists who have left the impress of their handiwork on these rocks. Were they to obtrude their identity while making the images of the gods? Mr. Havell has written of the unknown Indian Michaelangelo, Tintoretto and Perugino who worked in the caves of Elephanta and Ajanta. In Western art we can easily reel off the names of ancient, medieval and modern artists, but in India not a single name has come down to posterity except the architects and sculptors of myth and fable, names like Visvakarma, the architect of the gods, and Moy, the demon builder. Ancient Indian art was an anonymous consecration of high talent, the culmination of self-surrender and self-effacement.

The second obvious feature of ancient Indian art is the greater attention paid to the durability of sacred structures as compared with secular. The Bharhut Stupa is one of the oldest examples of Indian art and its date is approximately estimated about the third century B.C. There are no royal

palaces of that date of which even the ruins have much attraction. The sculptures at Bharhut, Sanchi and Amaravati are not only of great artistic value but of considerable historic and educative importance. The great Chinese traveller Hieuen Tsang, when he visited India in the seventh century of the Christian era, found the Nalanda University flourishing in all its glory, but the old capital cities of Magadha and other parts of India were in ruins. The universities at such places as Nalanda, Ajanta, Sudhanya Kata and Takshasila were sacred institutions and sacred learning was imparted in them. In the Brahmanic temples was heard the rise and fall of the Vedic chant, in the Buddhist *chaitya*-houses learned and pious monks expounded the Law, in the Jaina temples learned priests and munis discoursed on the great Tirthankaras, the Pillars of the Universe, the saints whose colossal images are to be seen at Jaina shrines. The importance of Ellora is due not only to the Kailash temple, a marvellous combination of the finest sculpture and architecture, but also to the contiguity of Jaina and Buddhist shrines. The Indra Sabha at Ellora is a Jaina temple with sculptured figures of Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara and a contemporary of the Buddha. There can be no more conclusive evidence of the tolerance of religious faiths in ancient India than that a great Saiva temple should be seen near other temples of other religions.

Of Ajanta Mr. Havell writes: "Very rarely in the world's history has there come together that true symphony of the three arts—painting, sculpture, and architectonic design—creating the most perfect architecture, which are so beautifully harmonised at Ajanta." In many places in India there are numerous relics of the finest plastic art, but the Ajanta frescoes reveal the acme of pictorial art, in its perfect technique, the bold and sure sweep of the lines, the living reality of portraiture, the variety of designs, the vividness and graciousness of expression. The idealised likeness of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha that was to be, arrests the eye by the nobility of the

countenance and the suggestion of latent spiritual splendour. A copy of a splendid fresco representing the Buddha after he had attained Enlightenment returning to Kapilavastu with his beggar's bowl in his hand to see his wife Jasodhara and his son Rahul was widely admired at the recent exhibition of Indian paintings at the British Museum as perhaps the noblest existing example of the art of the Gupta period the classic age of all Indian culture. The pictures are not all hieratic and cover a wide range. Even in the sacred pictures there is evidence of the catholicity of the Indian mind. Brahmanic divinities are represented as freely as the Buddhist heavens. The Ajanta paintings cannot be dismissed as an isolated or fortuitous incident: they are the remnants of a school of painting as gifted as the world has ever known. Buddhism undeniably gave the impulse to a period of unprecedented activity in art as it laid the foundations of the Empire of Asoka: a ruler and a saint as great as Constantine. Pataliputra, Asoka's capital, has been buried like other ancient cities of the world, but his monolithic pillar edicts, noble specimens of the sculptor's art, stand to this day as veritable sermons in stones.

Judged by territorial extent, ancient Indian art wielded a wider influence than the art of Greece or Rome. In India itself the traces of Indian art are to be found from Gandhara to Gour in the north, from Rajputana down to the Bombay coast on the west, in Central India in the great stupas and temples, in the south in the temples and other structures at Mamallapuram, Srirangam, Madura, Rameswaram and Ceylon. Out of India on the west the famous capital of Mahmud of Ghazni was built by Indian architects, and the whole of Far Eastern Asia was inspired by Indian art. The sense of the impermanence of things, writes Mr. Binyon in *The Flight of the Dragon*, the transitoriness of life, which in Buddhism was allied to human sorrow, became a positive and glowing inspiration in Chinese and Japanese art. Some of the finest

Indian sculpture which has escaped the ravages of vandals and iconoclasts are to be found in Java. It is not in India, but in the courtyard of a temple at Prambanam in Java that the finest series of reliefs illustrating the Ramayana has been found. There is no clear line of distinction between ecclesiastical and secular architecture, and "throughout all the many and varied aspects of Indian art—Buddhist, Jaina, Hindu, Sikh and even Saracenic—there runs a golden thread of Vedic thought."¹ Some of the Jaina temples and other buildings are as splendid as the best Brahmanical and Buddhist temples. The towers of victory at Chitor, the vaulted shrines at Mount Abu, the hill temples of Palitana and Girnar, the colossal images of Tirthankaras at Sravan, Belgola, Karkalu and elsewhere are notable achievements of architectural and sculptural art.

To the uninstructed and undiscerning observer from the West the imposing figure of the Trimurti at Elephanta, the four-headed Brahma, the five-headed Siva, the elephant-headed Ganesha will appear as grotesque sculpture to be classed with the centaurs, the satyrs and the fauns of ancient Greek art, monstrosities which are looked upon as divinities by a savage, heathen race. The difference between ancient European and Indian arts is that the former confines itself to the beauty of the figure, whereas the latter suggests the beauty behind and beyond the figures. At its best the art of Greece and Rome is realistic in the sense that it seeks to typify and idealise beauty as perceived by the eye: Indian art represents the divinities of the different Indian pantheons as conceived by the mind and visualised by the eye of faith. It is possible for a man or a woman to resemble a sculptured Greek god or goddess, but no one in India would dream of comparing a human being to the image of a god. In actual practice Siva is not usually represented as having five heads, nor did the imagers and frescoists of Ajanta often depict Parvati with

¹ Havel: *Ideals of Indian Art*.

ten arms Greek art was entirely detached from Greek philosophy. The Greeks attributed human suffering and sickness to the envy of the gods; the Indians ascribed them to *karma*. The attainment of physical perfection in life was the great ambition of the Hellenic people and the Greek artist endowed his gods and goddesses with perfect symmetry of face and figure, the finest contour of the head and the most fascinating poise and grace of limb. The art of India is an academy of symbology. Even a flower like the lotus is a symbol of almost universal application in architecture in the theory of the creation in the standing or sitting position of the gods in ornamentation the lotus recurs everywhere. No artists outside India ever thought of representing a god engaged in contemplation. In the classic art of Europe it is always the ripple of the muscle, the vivid vitality of the features, the dazzling outlook on life that arrest the eye; here in India art has fixed the tranquillity of repose; it has conveyed the majesty of meditation, the sublimity of aloofness and withdrawal. This calmness is not inertia but the flickerless steadiness of a flame lighting a closed temple. The Western artist always thought of pose; the Indian thought reverently of posture. The great Buddha statue at Anuradhapura in Ceylon, the Trimurti at Elephanta, the statues of the Tirthankaras, the Dhyani Buddha or Amitabha, the Bodhi-sattvas are all figures of physical restraint with intense spiritual vitality. The image of the Buddha in its inconceivable calmness and passionlessness is the very embodiment of the immutability of the Law that he preached and the serene consciousness of the final and full attainment of liberty.

On the other hand the fine bronze figure in Madras of Siva as Nataraja dancing the *tandava* dance is a symbol of cosmic commotion, the effervescent joy of creation. The Greek and Roman imagers knew nothing of the symbolism and significance of the gestures of the fingers and hands, the *mudras*, and it was only after the introduction of Christian art that the up

raising of two fingers as a symbol of benediction is to be found in European pictures. If we place a likeness of the Apollo Belvedere by the side of one of the Avalokitesvara at Borobudur in Java, and of the Venus of Milo by that of Uma in meditation on the Himalayas, we shall easily appreciate the difference and the distinction between Western and Indian art. If the art of Greece at its strongest and best may be likened to epic poetry, ancient Indian art may be compared to the solemn and sacred poetry of the Vedas and the Gathas.

With the eighth century of the Christian era began the decadence of art in India, the perversion of religious thought and the political disintegration of the country. Some time later the repeated raids of Mahmud of Ghazni swept over part of India like a hurricane of fire and destruction; the famous temple of Somnath was plundered and destroyed, and ten thousand temples in Kanauj were razed to the dust. With the coming of the Great Moghuls there was a change, and the conditions of life and occupation became more stable. Of the six Moghul Emperors from Babar to Aurangzeb it may be truthfully said that there is no other example in history of such remarkable heredity in conspicuous ability for six generations in lineal descent, but while the three greatest Moghuls, Akbar, Jehangir and Shah Jehan, devoted themselves to the work of construction and consolidation, in Aurangzeb was born anew the unrestrained passion of iconoclasm and the fanaticism of bigotry, and his great energy was spent in the destruction of temples at Benares and other places, and in unwittingly sapping the foundations of the Moghul Empire. Akbar was one of those men to whom greatness comes from within, without help or guidance. Unlettered, he was wiser than other men steeped in learning; untaught in religious dogma, he had the widest tolerance in religion; uninitiated in statecraft, he was one of the greatest statesmen the world has seen; ignorant alike of books and art he was one of the greatest patrons of art and letters and held some of the

soundest views on art. As builders Akbar and Shah Jehan rank very high but it is misleading to designate Moghul architecture as the Indo-Saracenic style. That would imply that there are different branches of the Saracenic style of architecture with certain features common to all. It would be clearly erroneous to make such classifications as Hispano-Saracenic, Turko-Saracenic, Arab-Saracenic and Indo-Saracenic for Moghul architecture in India has nothing in common with any Saracenic style out of India. The Taj Mahal, the apogee of Moghul art, is essentially Indian in design, the groundwork, the central dome and the four small cupolas being conceived in the *pancha ratna* style. The decadence of Indian art did not mean its extinction. It became renascent in a modified form under Moghul patronage. At Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri and Jehanabad, Delhi, there are clear indications of a great and beautiful art, imperial in the magnificence of its proportions and stamped by the individuality of Akbar and Shah Jehan. Mr. Havell very happily describes the Taj Mahal as a living image of Mumtaz Mahal herself in all the glory of her radiant beauty. In all inlaid mosaic work, whether in the Taj Mahal, Itmad ud Daula or the tomb of Sheikh Salim Chishti, the Koranic inhibition has excluded all living things but the leaves, the plants, the vessels and the flowers are shown with consummate skill, the coloured stones and the pearl and ebony being arranged with an excellent eye to effect. The fairy-like tracery windows¹ of the marble tomb of Sheikh Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri, the Pearl Mosque in the Agra Fort for the ladies of the Imperial harem, the perforated screens of marble are the productions of a delicate and dainty art. The mausoleum of Jehangir at Lahore is designed with great simplicity, the imperial idea finding vent in the great quadrangle on the four sides of the tomb and the roof with its impressive spatial effect.

¹ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*

Moghul painting as seen in miniatures, oil paintings, portfolio pictures in water colours, illuminated manuscripts and illustrations of books, owes its origin to several influences. The Timurias were lovers of art and beauty in nature and Akbar, whose views on all subjects, including religion, were extremely liberal, defended and justified painting on the ground that a painter was bound, while painting anything having life, to think of God as the Giver of life, since the work of the painter stopped at the mere resemblance of the body. Persian and Chinese influence had a share, but the tradition of painting in India had a larger and more definite influence. It is at this stage of the history of Indian art that the word 'Hindu' can be accurately used, for the word was then in use and the religious distinction between Hindus and Mussalmans was clearly defined. The fact that Akbar employed a large number of Hindu artists is proof sufficient, because he would not have employed novices, and the similarity between Rajput and Moghul painting is unmistakable, though the contrast is equally obvious. The Rajasthani and Pahari groups of painting, the first from Rajputana and the second mostly from Kangra, Chamba and Poonch in the Punjab, are older than Moghul painting which they survived till the last century. It is both sacred and secular, whereas Moghul painting, which had a life of about two hundred years only, was of necessity merely secular and courtly. The Rajput artists, following ancient tradition, have left no means of identification behind them and their pictures bear no names; it is a repetition of the anonymity at Ajanta, Sarnath, Elephanta and a score of other places. Moghul portrait painting is of high merit and true to the life, unless the artist had to paint a patron who required to be flattered. Moghul paintings bear names and the majority are Hindu names. Mansur, however, was a Mussalman and an artist of a high order, his portraits of animals being wonderfully life-like. Akbar and Jehangir admitted famous painters to intimate personal friendship. Artistic skill

was not unknown in the zenana of the Emperors and the great nobles. Names have come down in history of cultured and highly intellectual queens and princesses and great ladies some of them past mistresses of statecraft others gifted artists and musicians and authors of graceful verses. The impenetrable and inviolable secrecy of the purdah had kept all their achievement from the notice of the world of men but still the world knows of the saintly and vestal lady a Princess of the Blood Jehanara¹ daughter of Shah Jehan who devoted her life to the service of God and in ministering to her imprisoned father and whose last request was that she should be buried in a pauper's grave with the green sward for a cover and the dome of heaven for a cupola and who left the following simple and touching verse as an inscription for her resting place —

*' Bur mazare ma gariban, na chirage na gule,
Na pare parwana suzad na sadai bulbule !*

On the graves of poor people like us there should be neither lamps nor flowers nor should the wings of moths be burned nor should there be the wailing of a nightingale.

It is reported that Rembrandt and Reynolds saw Moghul paintings and admired them and the former copied some of them.

The revival of Indian art and art tradition has begun in Bengal and is associated with the school of which Abanindranath Tagore is the leader. Their work has been appreciated and admired out of India. The influence of Japanese art is noticeable in their earlier work, but they have outgrown this stage and have produced original paintings conforming to Indian classic art. To keep alive the tradition of Indian art Indian artists while fully receptive and responsive to modern and contemporary influences and the far wider sweep of the

¹ She lies buried near the tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi.

vision of life, must seek inspiration in the ancient epics and dramas, in the symbolism of ancient sacred literature, in ancient philosophical thought and the multitudinous conceptions of supernal beauty. Mere portraiture and painting from animated or still life can never be a high incentive to art, and this is one of the reasons why Moghul art, cramped by its limitations and debarred from dealing with all sacred subjects, had such a brief career. And it is not only the artist who must be true to tradition and loyal to the ancient ideals of devotion, enthusiasm and selflessness, but our countrymen must return to the fold from which they have strayed and learn once again to breathe the atmosphere in which the ancient Aryans lived and had their being. How many of the graduates of Indian universities have read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, how many of them know even the names of Sanskrit dramas? The higher Vedic literature, the systems of philosophy, are difficult subjects requiring special study, but there can be no excuse for educated Hindus being ignorant of literature and ideals which are still living forces in Hindu homes and Hindu lives. Modern manners and modern culture do not surely require that we should consign the past to oblivion.

In the present European sense painting means pictures in an oil medium. Auctioneers and professional dealers call paintings in water colours drawings. Indian artists have to be careful in the media they choose for their work. Sir Joshua Reynolds was praised as one of the purest colourists but his colours were sometimes so ill chosen that some of his paintings are already fading. Well-known painters in Europe used sometimes lamp-black as an under-tint with the result that it came up to the surface and discoloured the upper coatings of different colours. Paintings at best are easily spoiled or lose colour even if they are not destroyed. Are the Indian artists, who are attempting a revival of genuine Indian art, satisfied that their work will endure as long as the Rajput and

Moghul paintings? The paper the pigments used by those artists are no longer in use. Is it not worth while to make an attempt to procure and reintroduce them? All the materials now used the paper the paint and the brush are brought from Europe. Artists colourmen in Europe have put on the market more than two hundred colours of which less than twenty are reliable. The thought is disquieting that modern colours may not prove even so fast as those that were in use in India three or four hundred years ago. This is a matter that concerns primarily the present artists of India.

Truly has Ruskin said all great Art is praise praise of all that is in nature of all that has life of the human form divine but above all what the mind and the spirit can conceive but the eye cannot see of the noumena behind phenomena of the thought symbol behind the projected object of the absolute behind the concrete. Art is suggestion as well as representation eloquent not only by what it expresses but also what it leaves out. The aim of true art is not merely to produce facsimiles and verisimilitudes but to stimulate thought so that the mind of the beholder may endeavour to interpret the idea of the artist as outlined in the picture. The concentration of the true artist is as intense as that of the earnest worshipper. If there is joy in the artist's work if there is pleasure in watching a thing of beauty grow under his hand there is reverence also in his devotion to his ideal to the thought image that he endeavours to shape in stone or trace on canvas or paper. It is the faculty of praise that tends to uplift man a nature and praise finds a noble expression in art. The original mainspring of all art in all lands is a conception of the divine. The form of faith may vary but the divine transcends the human in all aspects and every thought of the deity is praise.

Since I began with a brief sketch of the history of art in the West these observations may be brought to a close by a

reference to the prospects of art in that part of the world. The cultivation and development of art is among the triumphs of peace, but there is no real peace in the West. So real was the menace of extinction in the last war that the instinct of self-preservation has led the nations of Europe to establish the League of Nations, but the real guarantee of peace is in the heart and not in any tribunal or institution created for that purpose. The air is surcharged with jealousy and suspicion, and thoughts of revenge are secretly nourished by the nations which were defeated and humiliated. There is no relaxation of tension, no relinquishment of aggressive vigilance. There is always a hint of rupture behind diplomatic relations, a chronic scepticism in professions of friendship. In the Far West across the Atlantic we see a new and great race founded originally by colonists and settlers from England and Ireland, and subsequently augmented by the interfusion of emigrants from the other nations of Europe. In industry and wealth the United States of America have left Europe far behind, but the nation is neither troubled nor stimulated by any memories of the past, nor does it recognise any tradition that has to be maintained. There are great names like Abraham Lincoln and Ralph Waldo Emerson, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Alva Edison, but there have been no precursors of a great literature, or a great art, and it may be fairly doubted whether the Americans will achieve more than they have already done. The architecture of America has introduced no new or attractive style. The great ambition is to erect sky-scrappers, piles of buildings high as the Tower of Babel. The usual comment of an American tourist when he sees some famous buildings in the Old World is that America has buildings twenty or thirty times as large. Since the Declaration of Independence America has not produced a single famous painter. The New World has introduced a new cult: Mammon and Megalomania sit throned on high, and the crowd bows down to them and worships them. Staggering figures of the fabulous wealth

acquired by individuals are announced from time to time, but one looks in vain for any signs of any striking use made of this hoarded treasure, of any liberal patronage of the arts, the erection of a structure that should arrest the eyes of the world or any large endowment likely to benefit the cause of humanity. The great name of Andrew Carnegie alone has to be excepted. In ancient times wealthy men became famous because of the use they made of their wealth, since there is no merit in the mere piling up of gold. Megalomania is a delusion of power and greatness that is considered a malady, but it has become a universal national failing. It is an omen of evil because the obsession of greatness is not good either for the individual or the nation. The auguries are not promising of a revival of great art in the Far West.

RAMKRISHNA PARAMHANSA

RAMKRISHNA PARAMHANSA.

Of men that are called great, the greatest are the givers of radiance, the shedders of light, those who guide the groping hands and the hesitant and straying feet of men, who lift up the drooping hearts of men with strong words of faith. There is no accounting for them, there is no explanation of their gift beyond the bare statement that it seems to be conferred by a higher Power which chooses them as instruments for the diffusion of light. This is the highest heroic element in man and forms his highest distinction. The highest gift vouchsafed unto man is the gift of faith, and the strength to inspire others with faith. The fabled messenger of the gods had wings on his heels, but the messengers that are seen on earth release winged words which fly on tireless pinions through the wide and endless expanses of Time. Men assign without hesitation the highest place to the teachers of humanity, the men who show the path that leads Godward. Among these is the assured place of Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

The great bulk of humanity is usually content with the ways of the world. The impermanence of all things mundane does not seriously disturb the thoughts of men. The bonds of the world paralyse their spirit, the wrappings of life form an impenetrable veil for their vision. In varying degrees different peoples in different lands have hazy notions of a hereafter, of things beyond this life and beyond this earth, of a vitalising and energising Force behind manifest phenomena. Transcending these early thoughts comes the conception of a Creator and Sustainer to whom homage is due. At the most, this is a fleeting and passing thought, and does not materially influence the course of life. While all waking thoughts are given to the affairs of this life, men, even when

they are inclined to be religious, snatch only a few moments to think of their God, or the mystery of being. The world absorbs them as a piece of sponge absorbs water.

At times the dreary desolation of the Dead Sea of a stagnant humanity is quickened and galvanised into consciousness by the urgent voice of some great Teacher moved by compassion. He picks up the Dead Sea apple, the fruit of worldly life, beautiful and tempting to the eye, breaks it and shows the rotteness within. And his words are words of hope and good cheer, a call not merely to repentance but also to righteousness, a promise that man may come into his inheritance if he prove worthy. Such a Master may be born in a king's palace, or cradled in a stable manger, he may be born in a desert country or in a poor man's home. He is not a creature of circumstances, he is not affected by his surroundings. The signs that may distinguish him from other men come to be recognised either at birth or later on, the latent power in him may develop early or may mature at a later stage of life, but his message is always delivered and his part is always fulfilled before he lays down his life.

Born in a good but poor Brahmin family in a village in West Bengal the boy Gadadhar, who was afterwards known as Ramkrishna Paramhansa, began by both justifying and upsetting Carlyle's theory that the greatest men were born before any books were written. This is true to the extent that some of the greatest and most ancient books were composed by word of mouth but were not reduced to writing till several centuries later. There were great men when no books had been written, but men may become great even now without the help of books. Ramkrishna took an early aversion to books and he did not acquire even the little learning that the village school could bestow. He barely learned to read his own language but never acquired any other. If, however, he had a distaste for books he was avid about every thing pertaining to religion, and eagerly read such Bengali

books as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, and anything else that came his way. But in all he read very little and could not be called an educated man. In conversation also he used the language of an ignorant villager, mixing up the respectful and the familiar forms of the pronoun 'you' in Bengali, and using swear-words freely. And yet in this crude form of speech he expressed thoughts which amazed and delighted his hearers, including several highly cultured persons in Bengal. Many of his sayings have become familiar as household words.

While yet a boy in his teens, Ramkrishna came to Calcutta with his brother, much older than himself, and afterwards moved to the temple at Dakshineswar on the bank of the Ganges, a few miles to the north of Calcutta. This temple had just been built and endowed by Rani Rasmani, a devout and wealthy woman belonging to an humble caste. The chief idol in the temple was an image of the goddess Kali in stone, but there were several temples with other images in them. Ramkrishna's brother was installed as priest, and after some time he asked the young lad to officiate in the daily worship. Ramkrishna was a good singer and he sang hymns and sacred songs with great feeling and emotion. His intense devotion, utter simplicity and truthfulness soon attracted the attention of Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law, Mathura Nath Biswas, and they treated him with the highest consideration as long as they lived. With the exception of a few occasional visits to his village home and a pilgrimage in the company of Mathura Nath, the whole life of Ramkrishna until nearly the very end, was spent at Dakshineswar.

Here in this temple and in the grounds surrounding it, in the little wooded arbour known as Panchavati, was begun and finished the spiritual evolution of Ramkrishna Paramhansa. This worshipper of idols, the lowest and most despised form of worship, this young man who had deliberately turned his back upon instruction and the knowledge derived from books, was filled with an overpowering longing to visualise Kali the

Mother whose carven image stood in the temple. He wept and wailed and cried out Mother ! mother ! mother ! until the people around him thought he was bereft of his senses. And he never rested until his agonised calls the yearning of his soul were answered and the vision of God as Mother was granted to him.

So marked was Ramkrishna's dislike to all worldly affairs that his people were agreeably surprised when as a young man he agreed to marry a little girl several years his junior. It was not a marriage as the world understands the word for there were no marital relations between them. During his protracted meditations and austere observances the sex instinct had been completely subdued by Ramkrishna. All women even the fallen among them were in his eyes manifestations of the divine Mother. When his wife grew up to be a young woman he worshipped her in due form and subsequently explained to her that the Mother of the worlds was visible in her personality as well as in the image of the goddess in the temple. She was in fact his first disciple and was held in the greatest reverence by all the followers of Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

At the temple at Dakshineswar food cooked and uncooked was freely supplied to Sadhus and Sannyasins who tarried there for a short space while on a pilgrimage to the various sacred places and shrines in India. Ramkrishna came in frequent contact with these people and learned from them many Hindi hymns and holy sayings. For a considerable time he was under the influence of a Bhairavi, a Bengali Brahmin woman who initiated him into the forms of Tantric worship. Next he met Tota Puri, a stalwart Advaitavadi from the Punjab from whom he received *sannyasa* and who probably conferred upon him the name of Ramkrishna. Tota Puri went about naked like the gymnosophists whom Alexander saw when he crossed the Indus and with whom he held converse. Ramkrishna used to speak of this man in later life as the

Naked One. From another person he learned the doctrine of Vaishnavism. He displayed keen interest in the tenets of Islam and for some time called upon the name of Allah and would not enter the temple of Kali. The name and teachings of Jesus Christ attracted him and he went and stood at the entrance of a church in reverent spirit. He went to the Adi Brahmo Samaj on the Chitpore Road in Calcutta and was much impressed by the genuine and deep devotion of Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen. In fact, he practised with full faith and conviction every form of worship that came to his knowledge or of which he heard, and he accepted every religion as a path to salvation. While under the instruction of Tota Puri he entered into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* which is said to be the final stage of communion during which the soul is unified with the Absolute Godhead and all consciousness of the outer objective world is lost. From this time onward Ramkrishna used to pass frequently into a state of *samadhi* and while in this state he was unconscious of his surroundings, but his countenance was lit up with an ineffable rapture and beatitude. For some time these trances were attributed to physical or physiological causes, but this theory was abandoned when it was found that the inducement to *samadhi* was in every instance some intense religious thought or feeling.

The best description of the state of *samadhi* is to be found in the *Maanavi* of Jalaluddin Rumi :—

“ Ecstasy and words beyond all ecstatic words ;—
 Immersion in the glory of the Lord of glory !
 Immersion wherefrom was no extrication,—
 As it were identification with the Very Ocean.”

Up to this time Ramkrishna Paramhansa was mainly concerned with India of the past, the India of the ancient creeds and the ancient forms of worship, the worshippers of Siva and Vishnu, Kali and Krishna. He had also given thought to religions that had originated out of India. The intensity

of his devotion and faith had brought on strange visional experiences. And now he came into direct touch with India of the present leavened by western education and western thought. He went himself to see Keshub Chunder Sen the great gifted and deeply devout leader of the Brahmo Samaj of India and very soon there sprang up between these two kindred spirits a deep intimacy based upon their earnest religious feelings. Both were well advanced in their convictions both were full of real humility. When Ramkrishna once asked Keshub to deliver a speech the latter replied. Am I to vend needless in a blacksmith's shop? I would rather listen to your words. I may recall another unreported instance of Keshub's humility. When Father Luke Rivington an eloquent priest of the Roman Catholic Church delivered some addresses in Calcutta some people in Keshub's hearing remarked that Father Rivington could not be compared to Keshub as an orator. Keshub deprecated this remark and said Father Rivington was a big drum while he was like a child's toy drum. Ramkrishna Paramhansa invariably spoke of himself with the utmost humility. He used to say he was an atom of an atom the servant of another man's servant. At Dakshineswar he usually avoided using the first person singular. He would say here or of this place meaning himself. When one came and said unto Jesus Good Master what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And he (Jesus) said unto him Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one that is God.¹ It has been a characteristic of great religious teachers holy men and saints to avoid the egoism implied in the pronoun I. The Buddha spoke of himself as the Tathagata. Jesus Christ called himself the Son of Man. Mohammed in the Koran uses either his name or designates himself either the unlettered Prophet or simply the Prophet. Chaitanya and the leading Vaishnavas called

¹ St. Matthew

themselves servants of other men, the well-known Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur spoke of himself in the third person singular as the servant of the man he happened to be addressing. The Buddha said, "Such things as a *Me* and *Mine* are really and truly nowhere to be found."¹ In the case of such men

" Love (the love of God) took up the harp of Life,
and smote on all the chords with might ;
Smote the chord of Self, that, trembling, pass'd
in music out of sight." ²

There has been some speculation and theorising about the influence exercised by Ramkrishna Paramhansa and Keshub Chunder Sen upon each other. The followers and admirers of both these Teachers have claimed the larger share of influence for their own Master. A speculation of this kind is neither profitable nor edifying. Both these great men had remarkable personalities, both were mutually attracted towards each other, both had high respect for each other, both must have derived some advantage from their loving and intimate intercourse. The Buddha met Nigantha³ Nathaputta (Nirgrantha Nathaputra), who was none other than Mahavira, the twenty-fourth and last Tirthankara of the Jainas, and had discussions with him. Who shall say how far these two Teachers influenced each other? Is it for any one to speculate to what extent Jesus of Nazareth was influenced by John the Baptist, or the Buddhist preachers who carried the gospel of the Buddha to Asia Minor? Does any one believe that the Jew and the two Christians with whom the prophet Mohammed associated for some time inspired the Koran? Advaita was older than Chaitanya and a very staunch Vaishnava. Does that justify the inference that the whirlwind of Chaitanya's divine love was influenced by the older man? Guru Nanak associated with Hindu and Mussal-

¹ *The Discourses of the Buddha: The Parable of the Snake.*

² Tennyson.

³ Nirgrantha—the unfettered.

man holy men Is there any need for making up an account of his indebtedness to others?

Following the distinguished lead of Keshub Chunder Sen other men of note began visiting Ramkrishna Paramhansa. The papers controlled by Keshub published some of his sayings and drew attention to the saintliness of his character. Max Muller heard of him and wrote an account of him and quoted his sayings. Protap Chandra Mazumdar of the Brahmo Samaj, a man of high intellectual attainments wrote several articles remarkable for their eloquence and expressive of warm admiration. Among other sentiments of praise he wrote — So long as he is spared to us gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity unworldliness spirituality and inebriation in the love of God. Elsewhere he wrote — He has no other thought no other occupation no other relation no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. The phrase humble life is somewhat perplexing. Are not the lives of great religious teachers as a rule humble? It is only in the midst of humble surroundings that the knowledge of God can be acquired. The Buddha the son of a king and heir to a kingdom begged his daily bread from the humblest or lowest people as well as from others. Jesus Christ said 'the son of Man hath not where to lay his head. And yet the Buddha was happier than Sreniya Bimbisara the king of Magadha and Jesus Christ was equally happy and on one occasion very precious ointment was poured upon his head as if he had been a king. And who was happier than Ramkrishna Paramhansa in his unbroken communion full of rapture with God? Humble as are the lives of such men they are fully conscious of their power. The Buddha said Lo the world is mine—the world I cast away only to save.¹ Sivanath Sastri and Bejoy Krishna Goswami also of the Brahmo Samaj were

¹ Shyama Shankar *Buddha and His Sayings*

frequent visitors to the Paramhansa and the former has left his impressions in writing.

Any man attempting at that time to form an estimate of Ramkrishna would have been hopelessly bewildered. He was married but, in his eyes, his wife was the same as the goddess Kali, whom he worshipped as Mother. He was a Sannyasin, but he never put on the garb of one, because in his heart he was a greater Sannyasin than any he had met. His aversion to woman and wealth was so great that the mere touch of gold or silver twisted and paralysed his fingers, and women were only permitted to bow down to him from a distance. Any reference to the affairs of this world filled him with loathing. He spoke only of the deity under various names and forms. In moods of exaltation he spoke to the Mother of the universe as if She were present before him. He relied upon Her as a little child relies upon its mother. In the temple there was no Delphic oracle concealed behind the image of the goddess and yet all his questions and doubts were answered by the divine voice within him. When he called a man a fool or by some other name, it sounded like a caress. He radiated joy and happiness and bliss. He sang and danced to the glory of God, and he rose to the height of beatific ecstasy when he passed into *samadhi*. He loved men of all sects and creeds and refused to draw the line anywhere. In him were fulfilled the words of the Buddha :—" Unsullied shall our minds remain, nor shall evil words escape our lips. Kind and compassionate ever, we will abide loving of heart, nor shall harbour secret hate. We will permeate ourselves with streams of loving thought unfailing, and forth from us proceeding, enfold and permeate the whole wide world with constant thoughts of loving kindness, ample, expanded, measureless, free from enmity and free from ill-will."¹

It has been stated that Ramkrishna Paramhansa was an

¹ *The Discourses of the Buddha: The Parable of the Saw.*

idolater and officiated for some time as a priest of the temple of the goddess Kāl at Dakshineswar. According to all accounts idolatry is a debased form of worship. Islam is known to be severely iconoclastic and violently opposed to the worship of idols, but in reality this revulsion of feeling is an inheritance from Judaism. In the Book of Deuteronomy it is expressly commanded that any man or woman who worships images or other gods, the sun or moon or any of the host of heaven shall be stoned to death, and even a brother, son, daughter or wife who entices secretly to such worship must not be spared. And yet no theist or pantheist Christian or Mussalman who saw Ramkrishna ever dreamed of despising his faith. The image of a god or goddess was to him only a symbol, just as he called his own body a sheath, a covering for the Reality in him. His speech, his life, his rapt intentness dispelled the illusion that he was content with a crude and primitive form of belief. He owed nothing to books for he never read them. What he heard by word of mouth from various devotees whose names are known only because he used to mention them may account partly, but by no means wholly, for the extraordinary range of his wisdom and the inexhaustible store of his spiritual knowledge. The most intricate and complicated system of religion in the world is what is wrongly called Hinduism, which from the original Sanskrit word *Indu* (the moon) meant as a compliment to the country, has passed into *Hindu*, a Persian word expressive of merely the dark complexion of the people of this country, but every doctrine and every tenet of this ancient accumulation of Aryan wisdom and belief were as simple to Ramkrishna Paramhansa as the A B C of the primer to an intelligent child. His preceptors, those that gave him oral instruction, were left behind. Even this immense treasure did not satisfy the craving of his spirit. Unlike a Hindu, who is usually satisfied with the religion of his fathers, he inquired about other religions and discovered the Truth in all. He was a living illustration of his own parable of the wood cutter who

was advised to go forward and who discovered richer treasures the farther he went. Ramkrishna Paramhansa turned with disgust from worldly wealth, but he never tired of acquiring the wealth of the spirit-world, and never rested till his treasure-house was full to overflowing.

The points of resemblance between the great Teachers of humanity fill the mind with wonder. The teaching in the Bhagavadgita, which has permeated the whole of India and has reached other parts of the world, was originally addressed by Sri Krishna to Arjuna alone. The first Teacher who charged his disciples to carry his doctrine abroad and to offer it to all alike without distinction for acceptance was the Buddha. He had all the learning of his time but he used only the simple Pali idiom then understood by the common people, and his discourses were addressed either to the monks or inquirers. He made use of parables and stories to expound his doctrines. The dignity, serenity and eloquence of his discourses are as elevating as they are impressive. Jesus Christ spoke in language of astonishing beauty and simplicity, making use of striking images and parables. But he also spoke to small audiences and not to large crowds. The Sermon on the Mount was delivered only to his disciples, for it is stated that seeing the multitudes, and evidently to avoid them, Jesus went up into a mountain and his disciples came unto him. Mohammed was unlettered and the Koran was uttered, Sura by Sura, in the hearing of the few faithful who were his early converts. The Koran sometimes shows the passion of the Hebrew prophets and again there are passages of great grandeur and sublimity. Ramkrishna Paramhansa, when not citing the scriptures about which he had heard, used the simplest similes and illustrations derived from the observation of the things and incidents of everyday life. There was a slight halt in his speech, but his words flowed on, unhesitating and unceasing, and the few people around him drank in the words with bated breath and undivided attention. The Teacher is different from

the orator who addressed and swayed multitudes. The words of the Teacher are charged with power and weighted with authority and he drops them as pearls to be picked up and strung together by the privileged but few listeners. The Guru teaches the Chela preaches. Jesus Christ put it exceedingly well to his disciples — What I tell you in darkness that speak ye in light and what ye hear in the ear that preach ye upon the housetops. ¹ Yea upon the housetops and in the marketplace in the forum and across the seas let the preacher with a mandate carry the word of the Teachers and Lights of the world to freshen and sweeten the springs and waters of life.

The persuasiveness and power of the great Masters did not always move the hearts of all their hearers. Devadatta was a cousin of the Buddha and a member of the order of the monks following the Master's teachings. He claimed to possess the power of *iddhi* (working miracles and mystery wonders) and insisted upon the importance of austerities and penances. He persistently endeavoured to undermine the influence and power of the Buddha and on one occasion when there was a schism between the monks asked the Master to resign the leadership of the Order in his favour. In the Jataka tales it is related that Devadatta was invariably an opponent of the Buddha in previous births and even made an attempt on his life. After the death of the Buddha Subhadra a monk who had joined the Order of the Bhikkhus in his old age said they were well rid of the great Samana (the Buddha) because he used to annoy them by telling them what was becoming and what was unbecoming in their conduct. Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve apostles chosen by the Christ and beloved of him and to whom he had promised Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And Judas sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver and betrayed him not by open denunciation or public accusation but by the treacherous kiss of

¹ St. Matthew

seeming love. Abu Lahab, uncle of the Prophet Mohammed, 'rejected his nephew's claim to the prophetic office at the instigation of his wife, Umme Djemil, who is said to have strewn the path of Mohammed on one occasion with thorns.' For this they have been cursed in the Koran: "Let the hands of Abu Lahab perish, and let himself perish! . . . Burned shall he be at the fiery flame, and his wife laden with firewood,—on her neck a rope of palm fibre."¹ Hriday Mukerji was a nephew of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and his constant companion. He tended his uncle in illness and served him in many ways, but he never realised the greatness of the Paramhansa. He scoffed at him and used to tell him to speak out all that he had to say, once for all, and not to harp on his ideas constantly. He became so rude and insolent that on one occasion the Paramhansa thought of drowning himself in the Ganges to escape the tyranny of Hriday. This man was at length expelled from the temple by the proprietors. A current of electricity, usually so powerful and irresistible, is baffled and set at naught by a non-conducting medium. Similarly, there are men to whom the words of the best teachers make no appeal.

Humble as was the life of Ramkrishna he never made any distinction between one man and another, between a wealthy and titled person and a poor and obscure individual. He designated every one, Raja or Maharaja, eminent writer or famous man, by name and was always outspoken in his expressions of opinion. Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the famous writer and composer of the *Bande Mataram* song, was reproved for his ill-timed and indecorous levity while conversing with Ramkrishna. So were Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore and Kristo Das Pal for their assumption of superiority. Householders were always advised to devote some time to the contemplation of the deity. Of what use was all the learning in the world, Ramkrishna was in the habit of saying, if it afforded no glimpse

¹ The Koran, Surah CXI.

of God? That was the touchstone on which the metal of every man's nature was tested. Dr Mahendra Lal Sircar, a learned scientist and the leading homœopathic physician of Calcutta in his time, who made a fetish of scientific scepticism, was strongly attracted by Ramkrishna Paramhansa whom he treated in his last illness and used to spend hours listening to the marvellous conversation of his patient. The rugged exterior of Dr Sircar concealed a deep love for the truth and he was fascinated by the inexhaustible flow of the truth from the lips of Ramkrishna.

What books could have imparted to him the lore of wisdom that he acquired from the Book of Life? He knew all without the books and he knew also what no book can teach, the knowledge that comes from within, the lesson which is written on the illuminated scroll of the spirit. The floating wisdom of the scriptures and the saints came to him by the mnemonic method known in India from time immemorial, but he gathered from this commonplace and mercenary world itself his gift of illustration and simile even as the lotus derives its beauty and fragrance and purity from the mud and slime out of which it grows. The figures and comparisons he used were extremely simple but strikingly and profoundly suggestive. For instance, he compared the formless Absolute, the deity detached from any conception of a personality, to water without form and the notion of a Personal God to a block of ice. The parable of the fisherwoman and the florist is a beautiful illustration of the man who cannot turn his thoughts away from the world and the other man who thinks of his God. A fisherwoman who had sold her fish in the market was returning home in the evening with her empty basket when a thunder storm came on and it grew dark and she sought shelter in the house of a florist who happened to live on the way. She was received kindly by the flowerwoman who asked her to put her fish basket in a corner of the yard, gave her food and a place to sleep near a room in which flowers were kept and below

which there were plants with flowers in bloom. Although tired the fisherwoman could get no sleep. She remained awake and tossed about on her bed, and felt something was irking her. At length she realised that the unaccustomed scent of flowers was the cause of her uneasiness and prevented sleep coming to her eyes. She got up, brought her basket and set it down near her head, and with the familiar stench of stale and putrid fish in her nostrils she went off into a happy sleep. Never can the man of the world be happy if his thoughts are withdrawn from the associations of the world, associations which cling to him as the fisherwoman's sense of smell is haunted by the malodour of fish. The florist is an admirable symbol of the man who turns his thoughts towards God, for in worship there can be no finer offering than flowers. As the worldly man, engrossed in the affairs of the world, derives no benefit in the company of a man of God, so the fisherwoman gained nothing by passing a night under the roof of the dealer in flowers.

And this identical thought will be found in the *Itu-vuttaka*, the Sayings, or Logia, of the Buddha:—

Like unto a man that wrappeth up
A stinking fish in Kusa grass,
And the grass giveth forth a stinking savour
Like unto him are those that attend on fools.

And like unto a man that wrappeth
A (morsel of the fragrant) Tagara within a petal,
And the leaves give forth a pleasant savour
Like unto him are those that attend the steadfast.

How can we account for this parallelism of thought and parable, illustration and symbol? Ramkrishna Paramhansa, uninstructed even in the speech of gentle folk, spoke often even as the Buddha and the Christ spoke, and again out of the radiance of his own wisdom. It was not a process of cerebration, conscious or unconscious, no mentation or intellection within our very limited knowledge, but a subtle sympathy of a freemasonry of

the soul defying time and beyond our cognition and conception I shall cite one more instance of coincidence between the sayings of the Buddha and the Paramhansa. Almost word for word the Bengali text of the Paramhansa's saying¹ is the same as that of the Buddha the only difference being in the moral drawn from the parable. In the *Kevaddha Sutta* in the Dialogues of the Buddha it is related that a certain Bhikkhu asked a certain question of the gods and getting no satisfactory answer came back to the Master to whom he repeated the question. Before answering the question the Buddha told him this parable. Long long ago brother sea faring traders were wont when they were setting sail on an ocean voyage to take with them a land sighting bird. And when the ship got out of sight of the shore they would let the land sighting bird free. Such a bird would fly to the East and to the South and to the West and to the North to the zenith and to the intermediate points of the compass. And if anywhere on the horizon it caught sight of land thither would it fly. But if no land all round about were visible it would come back to the Ship. Just so brother do you come back to me. There is an undercurrent of humour and slight badinage throughout the legend. Ramkrishna Paramhansa repeated the same legend to point the moral that after many wanderings the spirit of man finds peace in thinking of God and is at rest. It should occasion no surprise if this parable is found in other ancient books.

In the history of religions we find the same human weaknesses that are to be met with in the affairs of the world. There is no single religion small or great which has not been divided into sects and factions even as land wealth and other property are divided among men. Religious differences have led to bloodshed and the waging of war. Belief in one religion exists side by side with unbelief in others. The

¹ S : Sri Ramkrishnakathamrta by M. Vol III p 216

followers of every religion consider it as the only true and the best religion in the world. Some religions admit no newcomers into their fold and are strictly confined to those who are born in them. There is no other ingress. Those who profess one religion designate the followers of another faith in terms of opprobrium and contempt. Their own prophets and saints are the best and the greatest in the world. Out of each particular religion there is no salvation to be found. Each particular religion claims to be the only oasis in the Sahara of heresy and unbelief, the only haven of refuge in the tempestuous sea of doubt. There is a sense of superiority, self-elation, a persistent manifestation of egoism, and even the proud feeling of proprietorship. Some people look upon themselves as specially chosen by God, others look upon their God as greater and more powerful than the God of other people. As Ramkrishna Paramhansa said, some one fences in a little bit of the Ganges by driving in some stakes and says, 'This is my Ganges,' implying that he claims a particular and reserved share of the sanctity ascribed to that river.

Earlier Teachers taught love and compassion for all men and even for all creatures having life. Ramkrishna Paramhansa added love and respect for all religions. In four words he said what may be amplified and expounded in volumes: 'as many faiths so many paths.' 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' said Jesus Christ; 'and many roads lead to them,' added Ramkrishna Paramhansa. If religion were compared to a compass, the four cardinal points would be represented by the four principal religions of the world, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, and the other directions would indicate other creeds and sections. If the compass is turned round, all the different directions marked on the dial will, in turn, point to the north. All religions are so many radii streaming out in various directions, but however wide apart at the circumference, they have only to be retraced and all of them will be found converging

upon the same centre—God Neither by word nor by thought is any religion to be despised or condemned by any man This is Ramkrishna Paramhansa's message and this is his teaching

From of old men have believed in the working of miracles mystic wonders by prophets claiming divine powers saints and even poets imbued with a deep religious feeling This widespread belief is due in a great measure to the superstitiousness inborn in human nature but it is also part of the cumulative evidence considered necessary to establish the extraordinary gifts or capacity of the man supposed to be endowed with supernatural powers Very ancient books like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are full of miraculous incidents such as the restoration of the dead to life the opening of the earth to overwhelm an offender or to give shelter to some ill-treated being sudden vanishing from sight and so on

People are not deterred by the consideration that among common and credulous men the line that divides a miracle from a clever juggler is a thin one and even indistinguishable to very ignorant people On the other hand the mere multiplication of miracles can make no man a prophet or a teacher holding a commission from on High As a child Sri Krishna is reputed to have performed many wonderful miracles but if it had not been for the profound teaching in the Bhagavadgita he would not have taken such high rank as an avatar Wipe out the whole of the miracles that happened at Brindavan and Mathura and it will make no difference whatsoever to the reverence and the worship of Krishna But take away the Bhagavadgita and nothing will be left of his divinity and supreme personality Gotama the Buddha claimed no divine powers as in fact he taught nothing but self-reliance and self-control for the attainment of Nirvana The strongest language that he ever used was in condemnation of miracles or mystic wonders He explained that the unbeliever and

the sceptic might attribute these wonders to the possession of some particular charm. Said the Buddha :—" It is because I perceive danger in the practice of mystic wonders, that I loathe, abhor, and am ashamed thereof." In spite of this emphatic expression of detestation, legend and tradition have invested the Buddha with more numerous and astonishing miracles than have been ascribed to the founder of any other religion. Is Jesus Christ remembered and revered for his miracles or for the Sermon on the Mount and the beauty and the depth of his teaching? If the Gospels were not burdened with miracles, it would take away nothing from the real value of the books. But since Moses and Aaron worked miracles and Jesus Christ was greater than them, his miracles were also greater. The unbelievers of whom the Buddha spoke were not slow to disparage Jesus Christ. When he cast out evil spirits the Pharisees said, " This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." And Jesus had to expostulate with them and to explain that he derived his power from the Spirit of God. At the very last, even when the great Master was passing through the agony of death on the cross, they mocked him, saying, " He saved others ; himself he cannot save," meaning that the miracle that had recalled Lazarus to life after he had lain four days in the grave was unavailing in the case of the Saviour himself. The Pharisees are to be found everywhere and in every race, and at all times. The Prophet of Arabia is reported to have split the moon in two by pointing at it, and water ran through his fingers as he held them out. But did the Pharisees and the unbelievers accept the sign of the miracles? The answer is given in the Koran itself :—" The hour hath approached and the moon hath been cleft : But whenever they see a miracle they turn aside and say, This is well-devised magic. And they have treated the prophets as impostors." Miracles were quite common among Mussalman saints and Sufi mystics, several of whom could restore the dead to life. But it is

the message and not the miracle that is the real test, the true symbol of power. It is not by the temporary upsetting of the ordering of nature and dazzling the eyes of men and filling their minds with wonder that the prophet and the teacher are to be recognised but by their words and the manner of their lives, the errand of mercy and the message of promise. Think of the potency of the word when it is said the sound is Brahman and the word is Brahman and again when it is said at the western end of Asia, 'the Word was with God and the Word was God' (St John). Of all miracles on record the one that impresses the imagination the most, apart altogether from its credibility or otherwise, is one that relates not to life but to death to the strength of faith to the steadfastness of testimony in life and in death. An account of this miracle is to be found in the book known as *Tazkaratul Aulia*. The name of Hussein Mansur al Hallaj the great Persian Sufi and mystic who lived about a thousand years ago is known throughout Islam. He was a weaver like Kabir, the saint and poet of Benares. He proclaimed *An-al-Haq*, meaning I am the Truth God. This is no more than the *Sohamasmu* (I am that I am) of the Upanishad *Ahmi yad Ahmi Mazdao* (I am that I am) in the Hormazd Yasht in the Zend Avesta and 'I am that I am' in the Second Book of Moses. Wandering Sadhus in India go about shouting *Soham*. But Mansur was several times tortured and punished for blasphemy, and was finally put to slow death. His hands his feet and his tongue were cut off and from each dismembered and quivering limb came forth the cry, *An al Haq An-al Haq*! He was then beheaded and the body was burned to ashes and lo! even the ashes bore triumphant testimony with a disembodied clear voice. And when the ashes were thrown into the waters of the Tigris they formed into Arabic letters and framed the words *An al Haq*!

Ramkrishna Paramhansa characterised the desire to perform even minor miracles (*siddhah—siddhi* in Pali, *niddhi* in

Sanskrit) as evidence of a low mind. Why should any miracles be attributed to him when those who were honoured by a sight of him, and I was among the number, saw the main miracle of his self-luminance and listened to the outflow of the welling spring of wisdom that never ran dry? The lamp that burned within him, steady and unflickering, and diffused light all around was the miracle. It was a miracle when he passed into *samadhi*.

What can be more marvellous than that, when at length Ramkrishna Paramhansa drew a few disciples towards himself, he selected young lads and men of good families, receiving their education in English schools and colleges? It was a sign of which the importance has not yet been sufficiently recognised. He knew nothing of English and he had always consorted with Sadhus and devotees ignorant of English, but he did not seek any disciple from among them. "Why do I love young men so much? Because they are masters of the whole of their minds," said Ramkrishna. The young mind is unsophisticated, impressionable, receptive, responsive. And each one of the disciples was chosen with great care and remained under the closest observation of the Master. With what prophetic penetration he saw the promise in the boy Narendra, now known all the world over as Swami Vivekananda! He crooned over him like a mother, sang to him, wept for him, spoke about him with unbounded praise. What was the secret of this great, unfathomable, inexplicable love? It was the knowledge of the power that lay latent in the young, masterful and independent lad. The Master wanted to win this boy from the world and to set him on the path appointed for him. Vivekananda objected to bow to the image of Kali on the ground that it was a sign of a blind faith. Ramkrishna gently remonstrated with him saying, 'Is not faith of every kind blind?' Faith is not built on the syllogistic foundations of reason but on the unseeing rock of intuition, the adamant of the spirit. Samson, blinded, waxed stronger than he was before his eyes had been put out, and

' the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life ' When orphaned by the death of his father Vivekananda was struggling with desperate poverty and rushing hither and thither for employment in order to find a mouthful of food for his widowed mother and brothers, Ramkrishna, while apparently indifferent, was putting forth his will to hold the distracted young man to the rough road of renunciation When one of his followers asked for leave to bury his dead father, Jesus Christ, the Compassionate One, who healed the sick and promised to give rest to those that labour and are heavy laden replied in stern accents, ' Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead " Let the hungry feed themselves, was the unspoken mandate of Ramkrishna, though at the earnest entreaty of Vivekananda he gave the benediction that those who were left would not lack plain fare Not many are called to leave the ways of the world, but when the call doth come the iron must enter the soul of the man who wrenches himself free from the entangling meshes of the world Ramkrishna used to say of Vivekananda, " He moves about with a drawn sword in his hand "—the sword of intellect and wisdom the keen blade that divides the darkness of ignorance and slays the dragon of desire Some of the young boys used to go and see Ramkrishna Paramhansa by stealth, all of them were rebuked at home and some were even chastised In the opinion of the people at home these boys were being led astray by the strange talk of the strange Teacher at Dakshmeswar And so once again the words of Jesus of Nazareth were fulfilled —" Think not that I am come to send peace on earth I came not to send peace but a sword For I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother and the daughter in law against her mother in law And a man's foes shall be they of his own household '

Vivekananda was a brand snatched from the burning the roaring furnace of the desires and distractions of the world

He and his fellow-disciples never faltered in their loyalty to the memory of the Master, or in following his teachings through life. It is a little over forty years that Ramkrishna Paramhansa passed from this life and Vivekananda, the greatest among his disciples, followed his Master about twenty-five years ago. This is not a long period for the acceptance of a doctrine and the understanding of a message, but the result so far achieved is by no means insignificant. The gospel of Ramkrishna Paramhansa is not a new creed and it does not seek to set up a new religion. It is a note of peace in the conflict of the many contending religions of the world. It is the living faith of universalism. Is not every religion a path to God, does not every river find its way to the sea? There may be many religions, but there is only one Truth as there is only one sun in the solar system. To the man of faith there is salvation in every religion. Ramkrishna Paramhansa condemned lachrymose and repeated confessions of sin. If a man constantly thinks and speaks of his sins he tends to become sinful. It is not by professions of repentance but by the strength of a burning faith that a man frees himself from sin. This courageous and heartening doctrine has been carried to many lands and many peoples. The secret of the remarkable success of Vivekananda's mission to the West is to be found in the teaching of the Master. There is no exhortation to prefer one creed to another. There is no suggestion of eclecticism. There must be unquestioning and loving acceptance of all religions as true, every honour is to be shown to every religion. Vivekananda yielded a full measure of gratitude to his Master:—"If in my life I have told one word of truth it was his and his alone." Of the many disciples of Vivekananda in the West the most intellectual and the most gifted was Sister Nivedita, who was formerly known as Margaret Noble. I have seen her kneeling reverently before an image of Kali, and surely she was no idolater. In Bombay I have seen devout and earnest Zoroastrians helping the Ramkrishna Mission

liberally with funds. The largest donor a Parsi friend I have known for thirty years has refused to disclose even his name and the story of his attraction to Ramkrishna and Vivekananda would read like a miracle. The Maths at Belur and Mayavati were founded with funds supplied by the English and American disciples of Vivekananda. Those who have understood the message of Ramkrishna Paramhansa whether monks or householders recognise that it does not mean the setting up of a new church religion or sect. A new sect would be lost in the wilderness of sects in India. Rather should we look upon the doctrine of Ramkrishna as the confluence of all the streams of the various religions of the world each one retaining its identity and distinctiveness. The Ramkrishna Mission is the assembly room of all religions the reception hall where the Hindu and the Zoroastrian the Buddhist and the Christian the Moslem and the Sikh may meet as friends and brothers with conviction in their own faiths and respect for the faiths of others. In equal honour are held the Vedas the Vedanta and the Puranas the Zend Avesta and the Gathas the Tripitaka and the Dhammapada the Old Testament and the New the Koran and the Grantha Saheb. The first great evangelist of the doctrine of the truth in all religions was the Swami Vivekananda and he expounded the Vedanta the most ancient of all the living religions while upholding the claim of all other religions to the possession of the Truth. The next great apostle may be a Zoroastrian a Buddhist a Christian or a follower of Islam. Words like *Mlechcha* Heretic Unbeliever Heathen Pagan *Kaffir* and *Musnik* must cease to be current coin in the treasury of languages and must be decently buried out of sight and out of memory.

Up to the present time the majority of the disciples and followers of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and those who hold his memory in reverence are to be found among the educated classes of India. It has happened just as in the case of the

disciples selected by himself. If he did not acquire any learning from books it was of no consequence, for his insight was keener and his outlook and sympathies were broader than is to be found in any book. Men like him have been called incarnations of God, messengers of God, or God-inspired. This is a matter of belief, on which opinions may conflict, since a man who is called an avatar by his followers, may be called by a less respectful appellation by other people. There is no universal acceptance by all mankind of any prophet or a living incarnation of God. But there can be no disagreement as to the peculiar qualities which distinguish them from other men. If Ramkrishna had been content to follow the vocation of a priest, who would have heard his name to-day? What was it that turned his thoughts away from the world and illuminated him from within with the light of God? Some people imagined at first that his mind was unhinged and he was suffering from a physical ailment. What made them change their minds? And it is now admitted that he is among the few who, from time to time, bring light into the long night of human ignorance. Men are happy in the bondage of the world even as a prisoner long kept in irons finds music in the clank of his chains. Renunciation of the world is looked upon as an aberration, an act of foolishness, not only by men of the world but sometimes even by men presumed to be unworldly. When the Buddha gave up painful penances and a course of starvation, the ascetics with whom he had been undergoing this discipline discussed him and one of them said, "Have you seen so late that this man acts like a madman? When he lived in his palace he was revered and powerful; but he was not able to rest in quiet, and so went wandering far off through mountains and woods, giving up the estate of a *Chakravartin* monarch to lead the life of an abject and outcast. What need we think about him more; the mention of his name but adds sorrow to sorrow." ¹

¹ Hleuen Tsang.

This is the wisdom of the world but does the world deny to-day that the teachings of the Buddha have lifted the burden of sorrow from the lives of millions and millions of men and women?

Apparently such men spurn the world with all its fleeting pleasures and fascinations from a feeling of disgust with the ways of the world. But they are neither cynics nor misanthropes. They cast away the world only to save it. It is because they are filled with a boundless love for humanity because their hearts are moved by an unfathomable pity that they renounce the world. When a man falls into a pit he can be pulled up only by a man who stands outside and not by another who has himself fallen in. The man who holds a torch to guide other people though the darkness must stand clear of the crowd. It is only a man having eyesight that can lead the blind. The tinsel power and pomp of a day dazzles the beholder as a fluttering butterfly attracts a child. But what are kings and emperors and the mighty ones of the earth compared to these humble men who were content to be poor? When the Buddha stood with his begging bowl before the door of a householder barefooted silent and with his head bowed upon his breast did the man or the woman who put a morsel of food in the beggar's bowl or let him pass with an empty bowl ever realise that that beggar was among the very greatest ones of the world through all time before whose image millions would prostrate themselves long after the very names of kings and emperors had been forgotten? When they nailed the bleeding and tortured Christ to the cross did those who mocked him and jeered at him ever think that even the cross itself would become a symbol of blessing and salvation to millions upon earth? The king of the Jews they called him in foolish mockery and he is to day the Lord of Christendom the Redeemer and Saviour of all who believe him to be the Son of God. Ramkrishna Paramhansa lived an humble life forty five years ago. To day he is regarded as an avatar by many who can tell what place will

be assigned to him a thousand years hence? A considerable literature has already grown up around his teachings and his memory.

If we say one avatar is greater than another, or the founder of one religion is endowed more highly than another, we sow afresh the seed of the disputes that have been the bane of all religions. And how are comparisons between these Teachers to be made? Is it by a comparison of the miracles attributed to each one of them, or by the number of the following of each and the extent of their spiritual dominions? Either of these tests would be misleading. In the first place, the most devout followers of every religion are content to read their own sacred books and do not take any interest in other scriptures. Suppose, in the next place, some one undertook to read all the sacred books of all religions. Would that make him competent to make a comparison between the personalities of the great Teachers of humanity? Did even the disciples of the Buddha and the Christ, men who followed them constantly and listened to their teachings, know all about the Masters? There is no order of precedence in which such names can be placed and we shall be well advised in being cautioned by the grave rebuke administered by the Buddha to Sariputra, the right-hand disciple, who shared with Mudgaraputra the distinction of being the chief follower of the Blessed One, and was the ablest among the disciples.

On one occasion when no one else was present Sariputra told the Master: 'Such a faith have I, O Lord, that methinks there never was and never will be either monk or Brahman greater or wiser than thou.' Note should be taken of the fact that Sariputra did not call the Buddha an incarnation of God, or the embodiment of all divine qualities, because such a doctrine formed no part of the teachings of the Buddha.

The Buddha replied, 'Grand and bold are the words of thy mouth, Sariputra. Behold, thou hast burst forth into

ecstatic song Of course then thou hast known all the sages that were?'

'No, Master'

'Of course then thou hast perceived all the sages who will appear in the long ages of the future?'

'No, Master'

'But at least then, Sanputra, thou knowest what I am comprehending my mind with thy mind and all about my conduct, wisdom doctrine and mode of life?'

'Not so, Lord'

'Lo! here, Sanputra, no knowledge hast thou concerning Awakened Ones past, future or present Why then forsooth are thy words so grand and bold? Why hast thou burst forth in ecstatic song?'

This is the admonition to be always borne in mind How can we call one prophet or Teacher greater than another when we really know nothing of either? But human presumption is equalled by human ignorance and we solemnly proclaim some one as a full incarnation and another as a part incarnation of God as if we carry in our poor heads and puny hands an instrument to measure God Himself! It is easy enough to compare kings and emperors fools and wise men, men of wit and men of wealth poets and philosophers but the yard stick that can measure the Masters of mercy and the Lords of ruth the guides and teachers of the human race the pathfinders who point out the ways that lead to salvation has not been made There is a legend that a certain Brahman attempted to measure the height of the Buddha with a bamboo but failed to do so because he could not find any bamboo which was not overtopped by the head of the Buddha¹ This must be interpreted in a metaphorical sense for it is clear that the reference here is not to the physical stature of the Buddha The wisdom of this Brahman is not yet a thing of the past In thinking of

¹ Hsueh Tsiang

such Teachers let us at least endeavour to reach a frame of mind in which we may truthfully say, ' Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief.' Let us believe in the many paths that lead to the one Truth. And belief comes not in the pride of intellect or the rigidity of dogma, but in the lowliness of the spirit, the receptivity of the soul to light whencesoever it may come.

To Ramkrishna Paramhansa and the Exalted Ones of the Great White Lodge, homage !

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

A QUARTER of a century has elapsed since Swami Vivekananda went to his rest, and every year that passes is bringing fresh recognition of his greatness and widening the circle of appreciation. But the generation that knew him in life and heard his voice is also passing with the years. Such of his contemporaries as are left owe it to his memory and to their countrymen to place on record their impressions of one who, by universal assent, was one of the greatest Indians as well as one of the world's great men. There is no need to repeat the story of his life, for that has been well and fully done by his disciples in the four volumes compiled by them, but one who knew him as I did may endeavour to strike a personal and reminiscent note, and to recall, so far as memory may serve, some small details of large significance, and the traits of character and the bearing that distinguished him from the people around him. I knew him when he was an unknown and ordinary lad for I was at college with him and I knew him when he returned from America in the full blaze of fame and glory. He stayed with me for several days and told me without reserve everything that had happened in the years that we had lost sight of each other. Finally, I met him at the monastery at Belur near Calcutta shortly before his death. In whatever relates to him I shall write of what I heard from himself and not from others.

The conditions in India were very peculiar when Swami Vivekananda first attracted public attention. The imposition of a foreign domination and the grafting of a foreign culture had produced a pernicious effect on Indian life and Indian

thought The ancient ideals were either forgotten or obscured by the meretricious glamour of western materialism There was an air of unreality about most of the progressive movements in India In every field of activity a sort of smug unctuousness had replaced the single minded earnestness and devotion of the ancient times The old moorings of steadfast purpose had been slipped and everything was adrift and at the mercy of every wind and wave from outside India The ancient Aryan had realized that there could be no achievement without sacrifice and self surrender The modern Indian in his new environment fancied that surrender was not necessary for attainment Following the example of the West the Indian reformer did his work while living in comfort and ease The method followed was that of the dilettante touching the surface of great problems but seldom attempting to probe deeper Men with an eloquent tongue and the gift of persuasive speech stirred the emotions and feelings of their hearers but the effect was more or less fleeting because of the lack of strength in the appeals The conditions in India might be described as a flux if there were any assurance of a return of the tide Perhaps there was no conscious self deception but people were deceived and mistook the sham for the reality The placid self-complacency noticeable everywhere was an unmistakable sign of growing weakness and inability to resist the inroads of habits of thought and ideals of life destructive of everything that is enduring everything that is real in the long established order of things in India

In the midst of these depressing surroundings was the quiet and scarcely noticed emergence of Ramkrishna Paramahansa after a period of preparation and meditation unknown to the people about him He was practically an unlettered man like some of the great prophets of old and by occupation he was the priest of a temple a vocation for which he became unfit later on Ignorant people thought his mind was giving way but in reality it was a struggle of the spirit seeking true

knowledge and finding its expression. And when this was attained he no longer avoided men, and drew round him a small band of earnest young men who sought for guidance from him and endeavoured to follow his teachings. Many of his sayings have been collected and published, but these give only a faint indication of his individuality. It may be said with absolute truth that he was one of the elect who appear at long intervals in the world for some great purpose. It has been my privilege to hear him speak and I felt then as I feel now that it is only rarely that men have the great good fortune of listening to such a man. The Paramhansa's language was Bengali of a homely kind; he was not supple of speech as he spoke with a slight though delightful stammer, but his words held men enthralled by the wealth of spiritual experience, the inexhaustible store of simile and metaphor, the unequalled powers of observation, the bright and subtle humour, the wonderful catholicity of sympathy and the ceaseless flow of wisdom.

Among the young lads and men attracted by the magnetic personality of the Paramhansa was Narendra Nath Datta, afterwards known as Swami Vivekananda. There was nothing to distinguish him from the other young men who used to visit Ramkrishna Paramhansa. He was an average student with no promise of brilliance, because he was not destined to win any prize of the learned or unlearned professions, but the Master early picked him out from the rest and predicted a great future for him. "He is a thousand-petalled lotus," said the Paramhansa, meaning that the lad was one of those who come fully equipped into the world for a great purpose and to be a leader of men. The reference was to the spiritual sphere since the Paramhansa took no account of worldly success. Ramkrishna Paramhansa could not only read faces with unerring accuracy but he had also extraordinary psychic power, which was demonstrated in the case of Vivekananda himself. That young man was not very regular in his visits

to the Paramhansa. On one occasion he was absent for several weeks. The Paramhansa made repeated enquiries about him and ultimately charged one of Vivekananda's friends to bring him. It may be mentioned that the Paramhansa lived in the temple of Dakshireswar, some miles to the north of Calcutta. The Paramhansa added that when Narendra came he wished to see him alone. Accordingly, there was no one else in the room when Narendra came to see the Paramhansa. As soon as the boy entered the room the Paramhansa left his seat and saying "Why have you been staying away when I wanted to see you?" approached the lad and tapped him lightly on the chest with a finger. On the instant—these are Vivekananda's own words—the lad saw a flash of dazzling light and felt himself swept off his feet, and he cried out in alarm. "What are you doing to me? I have my parents." The Paramhansa patted him on the back and soothed him saying "There there that will do."

Shortly after this incident Vivekananda became an accepted disciple of Ramkrishna Paramhansa. The number of these disciples was very small and the Paramhansa was very careful in choosing them. Every one of these disciples was subjected to a constant and unrelaxing discipline more than Spartan in its severity. There was no spoon feeding and coddling. The Paramhansa's prediction about Vivekananda was not communicated to any publicity bureau, and he and his fellow disciples were always under the vigilant eyes of the Master. Vows *vratas* of great hardship were imposed upon the disciples and the discipline was maintained unbroken even after the passing of the Paramhansa. Vivekananda went to Benares and it was there that he acquired the correct enunciation and the sonorous chanting of the hymns and the *mantras* which he recited very impressively at times in a deep musical voice. I have heard him singing in a fine tenor voice at the request of friends and as an orator there were both power and music in his voice.

Ramkrishna Paramhansa frequently passed into a trance or *Samadhi*. The exciting cause was invariably some spiritual experience or some new spiritual perception. On one occasion—it was in 1881—I formed one of a party that had gone with Keshub Chunder Sen by river to see the Paramhansa. He was brought on board our steamer, which belonged to Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup of Kuch Behar, Keshub's son-in-law. The Paramhansa as is well known was a worshipper of the goddess Kali, but just about that time he was engaged in the contemplation of Brahman, the formless, *Nirakara*, and had some previous conversation with Keshub on this subject. He was sitting close to Keshub facing him, and the conversation was practically a monologue, for either Keshub or some one else would put a brief question and, in answer, the Paramhansa with his marvellous gift of speech and illustration would hold his hearers entranced. All of us there hung breathless upon his words. And gradually the conversation came round to *Nirakara* (formless) Brahman, when the Paramhansa, after repeating the word *Nirakara* two or three times to himself, passed into a state of *Samadhi*. Except the rigidity of the body there was no quivering of the muscles or nerves, no abrupt or convulsive movement of any kind. The fingers of the two hands as they lay in his lap were slightly curled. But a most wonderful change had come over the face. The lips were slightly parted as if in a smile, with the gleam of the white teeth in between. The eyes were half closed with the balls and pupils partly visible, and over the whole countenance was an ineffable expression of the holiest and most ecstatic beatitude. We watched him in respectful silence for some minutes after which Trailokya Nath Sanyal, known as the singing apostle in Keshub Chunder Sen's sect, sang a hymn to the accompaniment of music, and the Paramhansa slowly opened his eyes, looked inquiringly around him for a few seconds and then resumed the conversation. No reference was made either by him or any one else to his trance.

On another occasion the Paramhansa wanted to see the Zoological Gardens of Calcutta. His eagerness was like a child's and would not brook any delay. There were times when his ways were strongly reminiscent of the saying in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* that the *mumukshu*, the emancipated and the wise, is to be known by his childlike playfulness. A cab was sent for and the Paramhansa accompanied by some disciples was driven the long distance from Dakshineswar to Alipur. When he entered the gardens the people with him began showing him the various animals and aquatic collections but he would not even look at them. "Take me to see the lion," he insisted. Standing in front of the lion's cage he mused, "This is the Mother's mount"—the goddess Kālī in the form of Durgā or Parvatī is represented as riding a lion—and straightway passed into *Samādhi*. He would have fallen but for the supporting arms around him. On regaining consciousness he was invited to stroll round the gardens and see the rest of the collection. "I have seen the king of the animals. What else is there to see?" replied the Paramhansa. And he went back to the waiting carriage and drove home. There seems to be an obvious incongruity between the predisposing causes of *Samādhi* on these two occasions. On the first, it was the contemplation of the *Nirākāra* Brahman, a high and abstruse spiritual concept, on the second, it was merely the sight of a caged lion. But in both instances the process of the concentration of the mind and the spirit is the same. In one, it is the intense realisation of the supreme Brahman without form, in the other, it is a realization in the spirit of a visual symbolism inseparably associated with the goddess Kālī. In both cases a single spiritual thought occupies the mind to the exclusion of everything else, obliterates the sense of the objective world and leads to *Samādhi*. No photograph taken of the Paramhansa in *Samādhi* ever succeeded in reproducing the inward glow, the expression of divine ecstasy, *Brahmananda* stamped on the countenance.

As a young enthusiast passing through a probation of discipline Vivekananda desired that he should have the experience of *Samadhi* like the Master. The Paramhansa explained to him that this was unlikely as his nature was *rajasik*, that is, he had the temperament of a doer, one who achieves great things, and not *sattoik*, spiritual, and only a *sattvik* was capable of passing into a state of prolonged *Samadhi*. But Vivekananda would not be dissuaded and once while sitting in an attitude of contemplation he sent word to the Paramhansa entreating to be put into a trance. The Paramhansa promptly said, "Let him have *Samadhi*." Vivekananda at once became unconscious and remained in that state until the Paramhansa restored him to consciousness by a word. Vivekananda realized afterwards that the Master had judged him rightly and his proper vocation was that of a worker, and the time came when in fulfilment of the prophecy of the Master he held aloft the torch of Truth in distant lands and proclaimed that the light of knowledge comes from the East.

Under the vow of poverty and mendicancy Vivekananda travelled widely in northern and southern India for eight years, and his experiences, as may be imagined, were varied. He spent a great deal of his time in the Madras Presidency and he had first-hand knowledge of the evil influence of professional *sadhus*. He knew intimately the village life of the Telugu and Tamil-speaking peoples and he found his earliest admirers in the Madras Presidency. He was in Behar when there was great excitement in that Province on account of the marking of mango trees with lumps of mud mixed with vermilion and seed grain. In a number of districts in Behar numerous mango topes were discovered marked in this fashion. The trustees of an empire as the Government in this country somewhat theatrically call themselves may have a lofty function but they have an uneasy conscience, and the official mind was filled with forebodings of some impending

grave pen! The wonderful secret police got busy at once, and it was shrewdly surmised that the marks on the mango trees bore a family resemblance to the mysterious *chapatis* which were circulated immediately before the outbreak of the Mutiny. The villagers, frightened out of their wits by the sudden incursion of armed and unarmed but not the less terrible on that account, authority in their midst denied all knowledge of the authorship of these sinister marks. Suspicion next rested upon the itinerant *sadhus* wandering all over the country and they were arrested wholesale for some time though they had to be let off for want of evidence, and the recent facilities of Regulations and Ordinances did not then exist. It was found out afterwards that the marking of mango trees was merely by way of an agricultural mascot for a good mango or general crops. Vivekananda had to get up early in the morning and to trudge along the Grand Trunk Road or some village path until some one offered him some food, or the heat of the sun compelled him to rest under a roadside tree. One morning as he was tramping along as usual he heard a shout behind him calling upon him to halt. He turned round and saw a mounted police officer, bearded and in full panoply, swinging a switch and followed by some policemen. As he came up he inquired in the well known gentle voice affected by Indian policemen who Vivekananda was. "As you see, Khan Sahab," replied Vivekananda. "I am a *sadhu*." "All *sadhus* are budmashes," sententiously growled the Sub Inspector of Police. As policemen in India are known never to tell an untruth such an obvious fact could not be disputed. "You come along with me and I shall see that you are put in jail," boomed the police officer. "For how long?" softly asked Vivekananda. "Oh it may be for a fortnight or even a month." Vivekananda went nearer him and in an ingratiating and appealing voice said, "Khan Sahab, only for a month? Can you not put me away for six months or at least three or four months?"

The police officer stared and his face fell. "Why do you wish to stay in jail longer than a month?" he asked suspiciously. Vivekananda replied in a confidential tone, "Life in the jail is much better than this. The work there is not hard compared with this wearisome tramp from morning till night. My daily food is uncertain and I have often to starve. In the jail I shall have two square meals a day. I shall look upon you as my benefactor if you lock me up for several months." As he listened a look of disappointment and disgust appeared on the Khan Saheb's face and he abruptly ordered Vivekananda to go away.

The second encounter with the police took place in Calcutta itself. Vivekananda with some of his fellow-disciples was living in a suburb of Calcutta quietly pursuing his studies and rendering such small social service as came his way. One day he met a police officer who was a friend of Vivekananda's family. He was a Superintendent of Police in the Criminal Investigation Department, and had received a title and decoration for his services. He greeted Vivekananda cordially and invited him to dinner for the same evening. There were some other visitors when Vivekananda arrived. At length they left but there were no signs of dinner. Instead, the host spoke about other matters, until suddenly lowering his voice and assuming a menacing look he said, "Come, now, you had better make a clean breast of it and tell me the truth. You know you cannot fool me with your stories for I know your game. You and your gang pretend to be religious men, but I have positive information that you are conspiring against the Government." "What do you mean?" asked Vivekananda, amazed and indignant, "What conspiracies are you speaking of, and what have we to do with them?" "That is what I want to know," coolly replied the police officer. "I am convinced it is some nefarious plot and you are the ring-leader. Out with the whole truth and then I shall arrange that you are made an approver." "If you know everything, why don't you come

and arrest us and search our house?" said Vivekananda, and rising he quietly closed the door. Now, Vivekananda was an athletic young man of a powerful build while the police officer was a puny, wizened creature. Turning round upon him Vivekananda said, "You have called me to your house on a false pretext and have made a false accusation against me and my companions. That is your profession. I, on the other hand have been taught not to resent an insult. If I had been a criminal and a conspirator there would be nothing to prevent me from wringing your neck before you could call out for help. As it is I leave you in peace." And Vivekananda opened the door and went out, leaving the redoubtable police officer speechless with ill concealed fright. Neither Vivekananda nor his companions were ever again molested by this man.

Another experience that Swami Vivekananda related to me bordered on the tragic. The particular vow he had undertaken at that time was that he should steadily walk the whole day without either looking back or begging from any man. He was to halt only if accosted and to accept food if it was offered to him unasked. Sometimes he had to go without any food for twenty four and even forty eight hours. One afternoon about sunset he was passing in front of a stable belonging to some wealthy person. One of the grooms was standing on the road. Vivekananda had had nothing to eat for two days and was looking weak and weary. The groom saluted him and looking at him asked, "Sadhu Baba, have you eaten anything to day?" "No," replied Vivekananda, "I have eaten nothing." The groom took him into the stable, offered him water to wash his hands and feet and placed his own food consisting of some *chapatis* and a little chutney, before him. The chutney was hot but in the course of his wanderings Vivekananda had got accustomed to eat chillies which were often the only condiment he had with his food. I have seen him eating a handful of pungent, green chillies with evident relish. Vivekananda

ate the *chapatis* and the *chutney*, but immediately afterwards felt a frightful burning sensation in his stomach and rolled on the ground in agony. The groom beat his head with his hands and wailed, "What have I done? I have killed a Sadhu." The pain must have been due to eating the *chutney* on an empty stomach. Just about this time a man with a basket on his head happened to be passing and halted on hearing the cries of the groom. Vivekananda asked him what he had in his basket and the man replied it was tamarind. "Ah, that is just what I want," said Vivekananda, and taking some of the tamarind he mixed it with water and drank it. This had the effect of allaying the burning sensation and the pain, and after resting for a while Vivekananda resumed his journey.

In the remote regions of the Himalayas Vivekananda met with some perilous adventures, but nothing daunted him and he went through the treadmill of discipline with high courage and tireless energy. The vows imposed upon him entailed prolonged trials of endurance, an unbroken course of self-discipline, meditation and communion. When he arrived in America, without friends, without funds, he had nothing beyond his intellectual and spiritual equipment, and the indomitable courage and will that he had acquired in the course of his purposeful wanderings in India. One of his own countrymen, who had attained some fame and was a man of considerable eminence, attempted to discredit him by circulating unfounded calumnies against him. In spite of difficulties Vivekananda found his way to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and it was there that recognition came to him. He was probably the youngest man in that memorable and historical as well as unique gathering. Beyond the fact that he was a Hindu he carried no other credentials. The name of his Guru was unknown in Europe and America. He was an obscure young man unknown to fame, with no reputation either in his own country or out of it for scholarship, holy living, or leadership. It is impossible to conceive an assembly

more critical or less emotional than that gathering of learned and pious men from all parts of the world representing all the churches and creeds of the world. Men of great erudition steeped in sacred lore, reverend and high dignitaries of many churches, men who had left the seclusion of the cloister and the peace of the monastery had met in solemn conclave in a great city in the Far West. It was a Parliament not filled from the hustings and polling booths but from the temples and pagodas, the synagogues and churches and mosques of the world. They were mostly men well advanced in life, accustoming by years of discipline to self control, engaged in contemplation and meditation, and not likely to be lightly swayed by extraneous influences. Some of them were men of an international reputation, all of them were men of distinction. Obviously the least among them was this youthful stranger from the East, of whom no one had ever heard and who was probably there more by sufferance than by the right of any achievement to his credit. How he carried that grave assembly of religious men by storm, how pen pictures of the young Hindu monk in the orange-coloured robe and turban filled the newspapers of America, and how the men and women of America crowded to see and hear him are now part of history. Slightly varying Caesar's laconic and exultant message it may be truthfully said of Swami Vivekananda, he went, he was seen and heard, and he conquered. By a single bound, as it were, he reached from the depth of obscurity to the pinnacle of fame. Is it not remarkable, is it not significant that of all the distinguished and famous men present at the Parliament of Religions only one name is remembered to-day and that is the name of Vivekananda? There was, in sober fact, no other man like him in that assembly, composed though it was of distinguished representatives of all religions. Young in years, the Hindu monk had been disciplined with a thoroughness and severity beyond the experience of the other men who had fongathered at the Parliament of Religions. He had had the inestimable

advantage of having sat at the feet of a Teacher the like of whom had not been seen in the world for many centuries. He had known poverty and hunger, and had moved among and sympathised with the poorest people in India, one of the poorest countries in the world. He had drunk deep at the perennial fountain of the wisdom of the ancient Aryan Rishis and he was endowed with a courage which faced the world undismayed. When his voice rang out as a clarion in the Parliament of Religions slow pulses quickened and thoughtful eyes brightened, for through him spoke voices that had long been silent but never stilled, and which awoke again to resonant life. Who in that assembly of the wise held higher credentials than this youthful monk from India with his commanding figure, strong, handsome face, large, flashing eyes, and the full voice with its deep cadences? In him was manifested the rejuvenescence of the wisdom and strength of ancient India, and the wide tolerance and sympathy characteristic of the ancient Aryans. The force and fire in him flashed out at every turn, and dominated and filled with amazement the people around him.

Other men from India had preceded him in the mission from the East to the West, men of culture, men of eloquence and religious convictions, but no other man created the profound impression that he did. These others assumed a tone which was either apologetic, or deferential to the superiority of the West to the East. Some said they had come to learn and did not presume to teach and all were more or less overawed by the dazzling magnificence of western civilisation. But Swami Vivekananda never had any doubts or misgivings and he knew he came from a land which had produced most of the great and wise teachers of men. The glitter of the West held no lure for him and his voice never lost the ring of authority. Besides the people anxious to profit by his teachings there was a good deal of promiscuous admiration. There was the usual sheaf of romantic letters from gushing and

impressionable young women and well meant offers of service from many quarters. A dentist offered to clean his teeth free of charge whenever necessary. A manicure presented him with a set of his dainty instruments for which an Indian monk has no use. A more substantial offer was about a lecturing tour with a well filled purse of shining dollars at the end of the tour. The money would have been useful for the monasteries afterwards established by Swami Vivekananda but his vows precluded him from either earning or laying by any money. Later on however he accepted some money for the mission he proposed to found in India and elsewhere. Besides the open lectures that he delivered in America and England he held what may be called informal classes attended by a small number of select people usually earnest inquirers or people anxious to learn what the Swami had to teach. The actual number of his disciples in those countries was not large but he set many people thinking while his marvellous personality made itself felt wherever he went.

Swami Vivekananda had left India an obscure and unknown young man. On his return he was preceded by the fame he had won in America and England and was acclaimed everywhere as an apostle and leader of the ancient Aryan faith. At Madras he was given an enthusiastic reception. Some of the organizers of his public reception at Calcutta thoughtfully sent him a bill of costs. Swami Vivekananda mentioned this incident to me with indignation. 'What have I to do with any reception?' he told me. 'These people fancied I had brought a great deal of money from America to be spent on demonstrations in my honour. Do they take me for a showman or a charlatan?' He felt humiliated as well as indignant. On his return to India earnest young men came to him to join the Ramkrishna Mission founded by him. They took the vows of celibacy and poverty and they have established monasteries in various parts of India. There are some in America also so that Swami Vivekananda's work in that part of the world is

still carried on and his memory is held in great reverence. Swami Vivekananda told me that the Paramhansa insisted on celibacy and moral purity as the essence of self-discipline, and this is equally noticeable among Swami Vivekananda's disciples and those who have joined the Brotherhood after his passing. Every member of the Ramkrishna Mission is pure of heart and pure in life, cultured and scholarly, and is engaged in serving his fellow-men to the best of his ability, and the community is the gainer by their example and their selfless and silent service.

The last time I had met Swami Vivekananda before he left for the United States was in 1886. I happened to be in Calcutta on a brief visit and one afternoon I received intimation that Paramhansa Ramkrishna had passed into the final and eternal *samadhi*. I drove immediately to the garden-house in a northern suburb of Calcutta where the Paramhansa had passed his last days on earth. He was lying on a clean white bed in front of the portico of the house, while the disciples, Vivekananda among them with his eyes veiled with unshed tears, and some other persons were seated on the ground surrounding the bedstead. The Paramhansa was lying on his right side with the infinite peace and calm of death on his features. There was peace all around, in the silent trees and the waning afternoon, in the azure of the sky above with a few clouds passing overhead in silence. And as we sat in reverent silence, hushed in the presence of death, a few large drops of rain fell. This was the *pushpa-vrishti*, or rain of flowers of which the ancient Aryans wrote, the liquid flowers showered down by the gods as an offering of homage to the passing of some chosen mortal to rank thenceforth among the immortals. It was a high privilege to have seen Ramkrishna Paramhansa in life and also to have looked upon the serenity of his face in death.

It was not till eleven years later in 1897 that I met Vivekananda again. He was then famous alike in the East and the

West He had travelled largely seen many countries and many peoples I was at Lahore and I heard he was staying at the hill station of Dharamsala Later on he went on to Jammu in Kashmir territory and next came down to Lahore There was to be a demonstration and a house had been engaged for him At the railway station when the train came in I noticed an English military officer alighting from a first class compartment and holding the door respectfully open for some one else and the next second out stepped Swami Vivekananda on the platform The officer was about to move away after bowing to the Swami but Vivekananda cordially shook hands with him and spoke one or two parting words On inquiry Vivekananda told me that he did not know the officer personally After entering the compartment he had informed Swami Vivekananda that he had heard some of the Swami's discourses in England and that he was a colonel in the Indian Army Vivekananda had travelled first class because the people at Jammu had bought him a first class ticket The same night Vivekananda came away to my house with two of his disciples That night and the following nights and during the day whenever I was free we talked for long hours and what struck me most was the intensity of Vivekananda's feelings and his passionate devotion to the cause of his country There was a perfect blending of his spiritual fervour with his intellectual keenness He had grappled with many problems and had found a solution for most of them and he had in an unusual degree the prophetic vision 'The middle classes in India he said are a spent force They have not got the stamina for a resolute and sustained endeavour The future of India rests with the masses One afternoon he slowly came up to me with a thoughtful expression on his face and said If it would help the country in any way I am quite prepared to go to prison I looked at him and wondered Instead of making the remotest reference to the laurels still green upon his brow he was wistfully thinking of life in prison

as a consummation to be wished, a service whereby his country might win some small profit. He was not bidding for the martyr's crown, for any sort of pose was utterly foreign to his nature, but his thoughts were undoubtedly tending towards finding redemption for his country through suffering. No one had then heard of Non-co-operation or Civil Disobedience, and yet Vivekananda, who had nothing to do with politics, was standing in the shadow of events still long in coming. His visit to Japan had filled him with enthusiastic admiration for the patriotism of the Japanese nation. "Their country is their religion," he would declare, his face aglow with enthusiasm. "The national cry is *Dai Nippon, Banzai!* Live long, Great Japan! The country before and above everything else. No sacrifice is too great for maintaining the honour and integrity of the country."

One evening Vivekananda and myself were invited to dinner by a Punjabi gentleman (the late Bakshi Jaishi Ram¹), who had met Vivekananda at Dharamsala, a hill station in the Punjab. Vivekananda was offered a new and handsome *hookah* to smoke. Before doing so he told his host, "If you have any prejudices of caste you should not offer me your *hookah*, because if a sweeper were to offer me his *hookah* to-morrow I would smoke it with pleasure for I am outside the pale of caste." His host courteously replied that he would feel honoured if Swamiji would smoke his *hookah*. The problem of untouchability had been solved for Swami Vivekananda during his wanderings in India. He had eaten the food of the poorest and humblest people whom no casteman would condescend to touch, and he had accepted their hospitality with thankfulness. And yet Swami Vivekananda was by no means a meek man. In the course of his lecture on the Vedanta at Lahore, one of the loftiest of his utterances, he declared

¹Bakshi Jaishi Ram's son, Bakshi Tekchand, then a young boy at school and now a Judge of the Punjab High Court, remembers the Swami very well, and gave me his impressions after this paper had been written.

with head uplifted and nostrils dilated I am one of the proudest men living It was not pride of the usual worthless variety but the noble pride of the consciousness of a great heritage a revulsion of feeling against the false humility that had brought his country and his people so low

I met Goodwin the young Englishman who at one time was on the high road to become a wastrel but fortunately came under Vivekananda's influence and became one of his staunchest and most devoted followers Goodwin was a fast and accurate stenographer and most of Vivekananda's lectures were reported by him He was simple as a child and wonderfully responsive to the slightest show of kindness Later on I met some of the lady disciples of Swami Vivekananda Mrs Ole Bull Miss MacLeod and Miss Margaret Noble the gifted young Englishwoman to whom Vivekananda had given the beautifully appropriate name of Nivedita the *Offered One*—one dedicated and consecrated to the service of India I first met Sister Nivedita at Srinagar in Kashmir and next at Lahore where I saw a great deal of her and again in Calcutta where she came to my house more than once I took her through the slums of Lahore and showed her the Ramlila which greatly interested her She made eager enquiries about every thing relating to India She was in splendid health when she first came out to India but the austerities which she practised affected her health and she rapidly spent herself and was spent in the service of India Of her fine intellect and gift of literary expression she has left abiding evidence in her exquisite books

In conversation Vivekananda was brilliant illuminating arresting while the range of his knowledge was exceptionally wide His country occupied a great deal of his thoughts and his conversation His deep spiritual experiences were the bedrock of his faith and his luminous expositions are to be found in his lectures but his patriotism was as deep as his religion Except those who saw it few can realize the

ascendancy and influence of Swami Vivekananda over his American and English disciples. Even a simple Mahomedan cook who had served Sister Nivedita and the other lady disciples at Almora was struck by it. He told me at Lahore, "The respect and the devotion which these Memsahabs show the Swamiji are far greater than any *murid* (disciple) shows to his *murshid* (religious preceptor) among us." At the sight of this Indian monk wearing a single robe and a pair of rough Indian shoes his disciples from the West, among whom were the Consul General for the United States living in Calcutta, and his wife, would rise with every mark of respect, and when he spoke he was listened to with the closest and most respectful attention. His slightest wish was a command and was carried out forthwith. And Vivekananda was always his simple and great self, unassuming, straightforward, earnest and grave. Once at Almora he was visited by a distinguished and famous Englishwoman whom he had criticised for her appearance in the role of a teacher of the Hindu religion. She wanted to know wherein she had given cause for offence. "You English people," replied Swami Vivekananda, "have taken our land. You have taken away our liberty and reduced us to a state of servility in our own homes. You are draining the country of its material resources. Not content with all this, you want to take our religion, which is all that we have left, in your keeping and to set up as teachers of our religion." His visitor earnestly explained that she was only a learner and did not presume to be a teacher. Vivekananda was mollified and afterwards presided at a lecture delivered by this lady.

The next year I met Swami Vivekananda in Kashmir, our house-boats being anchored near each other on the Jhelum. On his way back to Calcutta he was my guest for a few days at Lahore. At this time he had a prescience of early death. "I have three years more to live," he told me with perfect unconcern, "and the only thought that disturbs me is whether I shall be able to give effect to all my ideas within this period."

He died almost exactly three years later. The last time I saw him was at the monastery at Belur shortly before his death. It was the anniversary of Ramkrishna Paramhansa and I saw Swami Vivekananda when the *Sankirtan* (singing of hymns with music) was at its height rolling in the dust and heaping dust on his head in a paroxysm of frenzied grief. The recent visit of the King of Belgium to the monastery at Belur was a homage to the memory of Swami Vivekananda. In the world war no crowned king in Europe was more innocent of blood guiltiness than the King of Belgium and India will gratefully bear in mind this pilgrimage of a monarch from Europe to the sacred resting place of one of the greatest sons of India. Swami Vivekananda's thoughts ranged over every phase of the future of India and he gave all that was in him to his country and to the world. The world will rank him among the prophets and princes of peace and his message has been heard in reverence in three continents. For his countrymen he has left a priceless heritage of virility, abounding vitality and invincible strength of will. Swami Vivekananda stands on the threshold of the dawn of a new day for India, a heroic and dauntless figure, the herald and harbinger of the glorious hour when India shall once again sweep forward to the van of the nations.

VIDYAPATI, THE POET OF
MITHILA AND BENGAL

VIDYAPATI, THE POET OF MITHILA AND BENGAL

SEVEN cities might have contended for the honour of the birth-place of Homer, but with the exception of the poet Vidyapati I can recall no other name of a poet claimed as their own by two peoples speaking two different languages. It is not as if the poet had written in two languages, or had translated his works into another or a foreign language with a fascinating felicity of phrase and an artistic selection of words. Vidyapati wrote many works in Sanskrit, for he was a profound Sanskrit scholar of wide attainments ; but the lyrical poems that brought him enduring fame were written in his own language, the language of Mithila, the far-famed land of Sita chronicled in epic song, the age-old seat of ancient Aryan learning, and now forming the district of Darbhanga in the province of Bihar. In spite of the facts that Vidyapati wrote his lyrics in a language which is not Bengali and that he was not a native of Bengal, he is recognised as one of the two earliest and greatest poets of Bengal, the other being Chandidasa. Vidyapati's poems are included in the earliest collections of Vaishnava poetry which flooded Bengali literature in the lifetime of Chaitanya and after the passing of that great prophet of divine love. Both Chandidasa and Vidyapati lived before Chaitanya. It has to be explained how the poems of the Maithil poet Vidyapati came to be included as an integral part of Bengali literature.

Before the time of Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, the preceptor of Chaitanya, there was no school or *tol* in Bengal. Mithila was the nearest seat of Sanskrit learning and young Brahmin scholars from Bengal used to proceed to Mithila to acquire learning. Naturally, they learned the Maithil language and

greatly admired the poems of Vidyapati which they copied out and brought with them to Bengal where they rapidly gained wide popularity as many people in Bengal in those days understood the language of Mithila Vasudeva Sarvabhauma was a brilliant scholar who became proficient in all branches of Sanskrit learning He had the misfortune of vanquishing his Maithil Guru in the course of an argument with the result that all his palm leaf manuscripts containing grammar Nyaya and other Shastras and the Darshanas were forcibly taken away from him and he was ignominiously expelled from Mithila the Maithil pundits vowing that they would never again admit any scholars from Bengal Vasudeva carried all his learning on the undelible tablet of his memory and established his own school at Navadvipa in Bengal and Chaitanya was one of his earliest and most distinguished scholars but from that time all contact between Bengal and Mithila ceased The songs of Vidyapati were sung in the famous *kirtans* inaugurated by Chaitanya and the language and the ravishing melody of the Maithil poet found many imitators among the Vaishnava poets of Bengal Among the early poems of Rabindranath Tagore are a number of delightful songs in the language and manner of Vidyapati composed under the *nom de plume* of Bhanu Sinha the word Bhanu being a synonym of Ravi the sun Rabindranath never learned the Maithil language or grammar but his poetic instinct and ear helped him to acquire the language of Vidyapati's poetry

It is tolerably certain that for some time after the intellect of Bengal had ceased to be in touch with Mithila and all inter communion between the two provinces had ceased the Vaishnava community of Bengal understood the language of Vidyapati's poetry and knew that the poet was not a Bengali But as time rolled on and the waters of Lethe washed away the landmarks of memory all about the language and identity of the Maithil poet whom Bengal had taken into her bosom was forgotten It has been pointed out as a defect of the

Indian intellect that it is entirely lacking in the faculty of historical accuracy, and lets imagination and hearsay do duty for the dry facts of history. This failing, however, is not confined to India. Vidyapati lived in an age older than that of Shakespeare, and yet in England itself there was a prolonged and even acrimonious controversy, the echoes of which were heard until recently, as regards even the identity of the greatest name in English literature. It was quite seriously maintained, with a great array of plausible evidence, that there never was any person of the name of William Shakespeare, or if there was one, the name was merely that of a mediocre play-actor to whose authorship the immortal plays were erroneously and gratuitously attributed. It was triumphantly announced that the real author was Francis Bacon, one of the founders of inductive philosophy and the famous author of the " *Advancement of Learning* " and " *Novum Organum*." Is it permissible to enquire whether this controversy is considered a laudable instance of historical research and a careful sifting of the facts of history?

About three hundred years after the passing of Vidyapati the text of many of his poems current in Bengal became hopelessly corrupted, as was only to be expected, since the writers of the manuscripts knew nothing about the language in which the poems had been originally composed. Many other poems actually composed by him were treated as anonymous and were not included in his poems, because the last lines in which the author's name appeared were missing. This is a sort of *imprimatur* which is to be found in the poems of Hafiz and in the songs of Kabir, Tulsidas and Surdas, and in all the poems of the Vaishnava poets of Bengal. It came to be firmly believed that Vidyapati was a native of Bengal and several unfounded stories came to be associated with him. As, however, the language of the poems was obviously not Bengali, a theory, which was accepted without challenge or hesitation, was put forward that the language

in which Vidyapati had written was Brajaboli: a dialect supposed to be in use in Muttra or Brindaban. In point of fact however, there is not the least resemblance between the language of the poems and the dialect spoken in the holy places named above. Moreover it was never asserted that Vidyapati had spent a number of years in Brindaban nor was it ever explained why he should have preferred another language to his own on the assumption that he was a Bengali for the composition of his poems.

All the fictions about Vidyapati the mutilations in the text of his poems could have been easily set right by a scholar from Mithila but the poet like the prophet is not always honoured in his own country. The name of Vidyapati is venerated in Mithila there is a palm leaf manuscript of the *Srimadbhagavatam* in the poet's own handwriting extant in a village in the Darbhanga district and it is highly treasured. Manuscript copies of a number of Vidyapati's poems are to be found in many Maithil homes but beyond that nothing was done. The Bengali script is borrowed from the Maithil so that Maithil scholars have no difficulty in reading Bengali but nothing was done in Mithila either to correct the baseless theories prevalent in Bengal or to bring out a correct edition of the poems. All the errors occurred in Bengal and they were ultimately corrected in Bengal. A complete history of the poet's family was collected an old palm leaf manuscript of his poems was found in Mithila and a collected and corrected edition of the poems was published in Calcutta and another edition in the Devanagari character was published at Allahabad. A palm leaf manuscript of the poems was found in the library of the Maharaja of Nepal at Khatmandu and new poems found in it were incorporated in the Calcutta and Allahabad editions.

Such great names in wisdom and learning as Janaka Yajnavalkya Vachaspati Udayana and Pakshadhara belong to Mithila but prior to Vidyapati no one had attempted to write in the Maithil language. Sanskrit alone was used as the

medium of writing and the language spoken by the people was despised as a vulgar lingo. There is reason to believe that Vidyapati himself commenced his literary activities by writing in Sanskrit. There were three distinct stages in the output of his literary work : the books that he wrote in Sanskrit, the few others that he wrote in a form of Prakrit which he designated *Abahath* and the songs and lyrics in Maithil, which undoubtedly represent his mature and mellowed writings, and have won for him fame and a permanent place in the literature of Bengal.

The system of orthography followed in these poems is that of Prakrit as distinguished from Sanskrit. The language approximates closer to Hindi than to Bengali, and is marvellously musical in the selection of words and the lilt and movement of the verse. There is no attempt anywhere at eking out a poem. The majority of the poems are models of brevity and the lyrical cry rings true. Occasionally, the master singer strikes another chord in his harp and one listens entranced to the burst of full-throated music and the stately roll and march of his verse. For a fine simile take a fragment of a song :—

"In the gloaming of the dusk the maiden (Radha) came out of her house and passed trailing behind her a lengthening contrast of a streak of lightning on a new cloud. She is young like a newly strung garland of flowers."

The darkling twilight is the background of cloud and the moving maiden is the line—not a flash—of lightning moving slowly in the dark. The contrast is between light and darkness. It is a motion picture reminiscent of the superb similes of Kalidasa. In the *Raghuvansam* the princess Indumati as she passed the rows of princes waiting for her choice of a husband moved like a lighted taper at night, *sancharini dipasikheva ratrao*, and as she withdrew the light of her countenance from prince after prince the dark pallor of disappointment spread over their faces as the edifices along a street are swallowed up in the darkness when the torch that lighted them has passed. In the *Kumarasambhavam* the

moving figure of Parvatî adorned with various flowers is spoken of as *Sancharini pallavini lateva* like a moving creeping plant putting forth sprouts of new leaves

In depicting the love scenes of Krishna and Radha the Vaishnava poets had no thoughts about the love of mortals. These songs are regarded as sacred literature by the Vaishnava community. The mere fact that these songs moved Chaitanya who became a Sanyasin and took a vow of celibacy while he was quite a young man to the raptures of religious exaltation proves their essentially religious spirit. These poems are really allegorical and afford glimpses of deep spiritual suggestion. Writing of the poems of Vidyapati Sir John Gneraon who was for some time a Civilian in Bihar and is a linguist of some note said —

To understand the allegory it may be taken as a general rule that Radha represents the soul the messenger or deity the evangelist or mediator and Krishna of course the deity. The glowing stanzas of Vidyapati are read by the devout Hindu with as little of the baser part of human sensuousness as the Song of Solomon is by the Christian priest.

The Vaishnava poets belong to the same order as the Sufi poets like Hafiz and Jalaluddin Rumi. The descriptions of Krishna do not at all conform to the ordinary notions of manly beauty. His complexion is always described as green like new grass and surely the Indian poets ancient and modern were not colour blind. The beauty of Krishna was the verdant beauty of nature soothing and restful to the eye. In the Song of Solomon the virgin seeking her lover is not fair. I am black but comely O ye daughters of Jerusalem as the tents of Kedar as the curtains of Solomon. And further on she says Our bed is green. Here also is the idea of a colour refreshing to the eye.

The love tryst is the symbol of the soul seeking and meeting the deity in secret unknown to the world. The world knows nothing about an overpowering love for the Lord and is ever a stumbling block in the path of the devotee and the

man of God. Men who sought God and His great love renounced the world and escaped to the peace and solitude of the forest. In keeping her assignations with Krishna Radha laid aside every feeling of fear, and while the rain poured and the thunder rolled and hooded death in the shape of serpents crossed her path she went fearlessly to meet her lover :—

“The night emits black darkness, fearful serpents are moving about, the irresistible thunderbolt falls ; the rumble of thunder strikes terror into the heart, the clouds are pouring rain in wrath, the assignation has become doubtful. . . A snake coiled itself round her feet, but the maiden welcomed it since it silenced the tinkling of her anklets.” Then the amazed and perplexed woman who was accompanying her, the *duti*, asked her wonderingly, “O fair one, I ask thee, tell me the truth, how far is the bourne of Love?”

How could the worldly-minded woman with her limitations understand that the deity attracts the devotee as the magnet draws the needle, that this was a love that dared all and that love is stronger than death?

There is a startling and fine conceit in a poem in which the *duti* urges Radha to go to the trysting-place on a night when the moon was full :—

“Knowing to-night is the full-moon I have come; it is fitting that thou shouldst keep the tryst. The light of thy body will mingle with the moonbeams and who will be able to distinguish between the two? O beauteous one, I considered in my heart and I opened my eyes and I saw there is not another maid in the world to compare with thee. Do not look upon darkness as thy friend, for thy countenance is the enemy of darkness. Let alone the conflict of nature ; rise and come where Murari is waiting for thee. The maid listened to the messenger and Cupid became her guide. The poet Vidyapati says, the fair maiden went to the assignation with Hari.”

The invisibility of Radha in the moonlight that flooded the earth is a daring and suggestive conception. The figure and fairness of Radha would merge in the moonlight as a component part of it and she did not need the magic cap of invisibility to escape curious and censorious eyes. On the other hand the darkness of a moonless night would betray her for is not there a perpetual conflict in nature between light and darkness and was not Radha like unto a slender beacon of moving light not merely in her incomparable beauty but by virtue of the luminous aura of her soul eager to mingle with the All soul and enveloping her as with a garment woven from starbeams? In the last line the poet says Radha went forth in the glory of the full moon to meet Hari. The name Krishna is not used and Hari is the highest and holiest name of the Lord.

Sometimes not often there is a play upon words in some of the verses. It is not high poetry but it shows the wonderful flexibility of words in the Sanskrit language. There is no more precise or more perfectly formed language in the world but the variety of meanings attached to single words is bewildering. There is no other language living or dead which can compare with Sanskrit in this respect though such words may be found in other languages. The word *cleave* for instance, in the English language means to unite as well as to split two altogether opposite meanings. Another such word is *liege* and it means both a vassal and a lord. The single instance of a play upon words that I have selected from *Vidya-pati* is not because it is important but because of an extraordinary coincidence. In a poem descriptive of the beauty of Radha there is a play upon the word *saranga* —

The word *saranga* is used no less than five times and each time it has a different meaning. Taken in the order in which the word occurs the meanings are (1) an antelope (2) a cuckoo (3) Cupid (4) Lotus (5) a black beetle or bee. Translated the verses mean —

" Her eyes are like the antelope's, and her voice is like the cuckoo's ; Cupid dwells in the glance of her eyes. Over her lotus-like forehead are ten ringlets like black bees, playfully sipping honey."

The coincidence to which I have referred is that there is a couplet in the Punjabi language with a similar play on the same word *saranga*, and there cannot be the remotest suspicion in either case of either plagiarism or even auto-suggestion :—

In these lines the word *saranga* occurs six times, but the meanings are different from those in the verse of Vidyapati, though in the Punjabi verse there are only three meanings which are twice repeated. The word here means, following the same order as before, (1) peacock, (2) snake, (3) cloud, (4) peacock, (5) cloud, (6) snake. The meaning of the verse is :—

" A peacock caught a snake. When the cloud spoke, that is, when the thunder was heard, the peacock cried to the cloud and the snake escaped from the mouth of the peacock."

Of the rhymes that swing to a stately measure part of one poem may be quoted as an illustration. It is a marvel of metrical movement :—

" Like the pleasance of the god of Love armed with arrows of flowers is her hair, with the line of vermilion in the middle showing itself like the sun in the midst of thick, beautiful clouds. To-day I have seen the fairest damsel in the three worlds passing with the stately gait of a lordly elephant, moving like the victorious flag of Cupid in the world created by Brahma. Her face is fair as the autumn moon and her eyes are restless like a brace of wagtails playing on a lotus of pure gold. Her lips are tender as new leaves and the glint of the pomegranate seed is in her teeth : it is as if the pearls found in the heads of elephants were arranged in rows on leaves of clear coral sprinkled with ambrosia. When she speaks with

a smile all the musical notes of the impassioned cuckoo the lute and the lyre in the three worlds are arrayed together

The time came when according to the tradition recorded in various ancient books Krishna passed out of the sight and out of the life of Radha. Regarded as an allegory the interpretation of this incident is the estrangement of the soul from the deity and the void following the separation. In his poems dealing with this phase of divine love Vidyapati has sounded all the octaves of the whole gamut of grief and anguish. Krishna left Radha without even bidding her farewell. Radha is speaking to a friend —

O fair one I fell asleep in the summer night and cruel Govinda did not even ask my permission when he left. I would have given him a close embrace even as the rising tide clings to the shore.

There is one famous song which is sung everywhere in Bengal even to this day —

My friend there is no end to my grief. In this full rainy season in the month of Bhadra my house is empty. The clouds are thick there is incessant thunder and it is raining all over the world. My lover is gone abroad and cruel Cupid is shooting his keen shafts at my heart. Thunderbolts are falling by the hundred the glad peacock is dancing passionately the impassioned frogs and the moor fowl are lifting their voices and my heart is bursting with grief. Darkness has spread in all directions the night is fearful and lines of lightning are flashing. Says Vidyapati how wilt thou pass the days and nights without Hari?

In another poem Radha says there are means of mitigating the pangs of separation in the summer but in the rains she is utterly helpless —

I shall chase away the cuckoo and prevent the black bees from coming near me by jingling my bangles but what shall I do when the clouds from Dhavalsgar begin to pour rain? I am alarmed when I hear the thunder in the sky and

the rain clouds rumble. At the same time, if I escape the fragrance of the south wind in summer, my absent lover and myself may forget each other."

A time came when in the passion and intensity of her grief Radha lost her sense of identity and suffered not only the agony of her own estrangement but also the grief of Krishna at the parting. The *duti* who has proceeded to Muttra to interview Krishna says:—

"Remembering Madhava, Madhava at all times, the fair one has herself become Madhava. Tempted by her own qualities and enamoured of herself, she has forgotten her own condition and nature. O Madhava, this love for thee knows no precedent. Her body is worn by the separation from her own self and it is doubtful whether she will live. Distraught, and with her eyes full of tears, she looks pitifully at her companion and, in a broken voice, incessantly repeats Radha, Radha! When she thinks of Radha she becomes Madhava, and again, thinking of Madhava she becomes Radha. Still there is no abatement of cruel love and the pain of separation is increasing. Says Vidyapati, as a maggot living in a piece of wood despairs of life when the wood takes fire at both ends and there is no way of escape, so, Lord, seems to be the state of the nectar-mouthed one."

The conception that runs like a thread of gold through this remarkable poem clearly and definitely transcends all notions of mortal love. It is the very ecstasy of the agony of the soul seeking union with God. The estrangement here enters upon a dual phase: first, there is the pain of desolation for the soul left destitute; next, there is the realisation of the isolation of the higher Soul which is seeking to draw other loving souls unto itself. There is the alternating consciousness of both the seeker and the sought, the double-edged grief that cuts both ways. There is a confluence of two streams of bereavement; but the waters do not mingle—they retain their individuality and distinctiveness.

The best known and most widely repeated poem of Vidyapati is one in which Radha in reply to a question of a companion, sums up her experience of love as it is commonly understood and plaintively declares how it fails to quench the longing of the soul. It is a threnody of aching and unsatisfied yearning but out of it gleams the ever varying newness and the never fading freshness of soul love, as the intoxication of wine represents soul intoxication in Sufi poetry —

Friend what dost thou ask me about my feelings? That love and ardour become new every moment even in the describing. From my birth I have looked upon beauty, but my eyes have never been satisfied. My ears have heard that sweet voice times out of number, but the feel of that voice does not linger in my ears. How many summer nights have I spent in pleasure and yet I do not understand what pleasure is like. For lakhs and lakhs of eons I have held him to my heart and yet my heart has not been cooled. Vidyapati says many who are wise in love are plunged in it, but feeling is not to be seen in any one of them. Not one can be found even in a lakh to soothe the soul."

The word *anubhava*, which I have loosely translated as feeling is in reality untranslatable. It is one of those words which are peculiar to the genius of a particular language and for which no accurate or exact synonym can be found in another language. The word itself is in common use and has a plain meaning but there is a deeper and subtler meaning which baffles translation. It is partly feeling partly realisation but in addition there is a subtle something which can be felt but cannot definitely be expressed. It is in this sense that the word has been used by the poet and it holds the key to the poem because it is to be found at the beginning as well as the end of it. The word was used by Radha's friend in her question so as to get at the root of the matter. The most ethereal among the English poets Shelley has treated of Love's Philosophy in lines of surpassing loveliness in which the deep

calls unto the deep and the heights reach out to greater heights :—

The fountains mingle with the river
 And the rivers with the ocean,
 The winds of heaven mix for ever
 With a sweet emotion ;
 Nothing in the world is single ;
 All things by a law divine
 In one another's being mingle—
 Why not I with thine ?
 See the mountains kiss high heaven,
 And the waves clasp one another ;
 No sister flower would be forgiven
 If it disdained its brother :
 And the sunlight clasps the earth,
 And the moonbeams kiss the sea :—
 What are all these kissings worth,
 If thou kiss not me ?

This is the loftiest expression of love on earth and also beyond it, the love that is mirrored in the affinities in nature and attunes itself to the music of the spheres. The note which runs like a long-drawn sigh of disillusionment through the verses of Vidyapati refers to mortal love, but there is also a haunting suggestion of that other love between the soul and the deity and which is the theme of our poet. The phrase about the lakhs of yugas is not a mere hyperbole but, symbolical of the exclusively Aryan conception of the cycle of life wheeling round and round in a never-ending sequence of incarnations.

There are some hymns in which the poet addresses Madhava or Krishna as the deity. I shall translate a few lines from one of these.

" Like a drop of water on a hot and parched sandy strand I have remained among wife, children and friends. I forgot Thee and gave my mind to them. Of what use are

they to me now? Madhava I despair of the hereafter Thou art the saviour of the world merciful to the humble therefore I place my trust in Thee How many four headed Brahmas die time after time! Thou alone art without a beginning and without an end Other gods emanate from Thee and again enter Thy being as the swell rises from the sea and again disappears in it

A fitting conclusion to a tribute of appreciation however inadequate to this poet will be the recital of his invocation to the goddess of Energy an ode of great sublimity —

Manifest thyself O goddess with the glorious thick tresses manifest thyself! Thou art many in one containing thousands and filling the battlefield of the enemy! Thy dark form is known as Kali thy shining shape is Saraswati In the nimbus of the sun thou art called Prachanda the Fierce and as water thou art known as the Ganges In the house of Brahma thou art called Brahmani and Goun in the house of Siva In the house of Narayana they call thee Kamala but who knows thy origin or whence thou comest?

The allusion in the second line is to the allegory in which the goddess Kali in the form of Chandika destroyed the demon leader Sumbha and the demon army It is related in *Markandeya Chanda* that armed warriors by the thousand issued from the shape of the goddess as Minerva sprang full armed from the brow of Jupiter and slaughtered the demon army Afterwards as this phantom army was disappearing whence it had come the goddess who was about to slay the demon chief with her own hands said to him O wicked one I am alone in this universe who is the second one beside me? This is the explanation of the whole poem Sakti or Energy is multi manifest but it is one and without a second in essence The antithesis between the dark and bright forms does not imply different entities The prismatic hues of the rainbow visibly different proceed from a single source Shut out the sun's rays and the rainbow with its

variegated colours will disappear. Notable skill has been displayed in the arrangement of the various manifestations of the goddess Sakti. Each one is antithetic of the other and so the group is divided, two by two. To begin with, there are the two forms, one dark and the other bright, one destroying evil and the other the source of all artistic creation. Next follow the fierce energy to be found in fire and the sun side by side with the gentle spirit that moves on the waters. We next find the two Saktis respectively, behind Brahma, the creator, and Siva, the destroyer. Finally, there is the Sakti behind Narayana, the nourisher and the sustainer. Different peoples in different parts of the world have realised for themselves, either independently or in subtle spiritual sympathy with one another, the existence of a supreme and first Creator of the Universe, who set the wheel of the Law in motion, and they have called him God the Father. In the progressive and later stages of spiritual thought the Aryans conceived another and a gentler phase of the unresting activity in nature, and realised by the intuition of faith what has now been established by the patient inquiry of science, the existence of a single, dominant Energy out of which all things proceed and which manifests itself in many conflicting and mutually antagonistic forms. On this foundation rest the allegories, some full of beauty and others full of dread, of the many-named and multi-form goddess, who represents the female principle in the law of creation and to whom millions in India bow down as God, the Mother.

**RABINDRANATH TAGORE:
THE MAN AND THE POET**

RABINDRANATH TAGORE : THE MAN AND THE POET.

STRONG in the human heart is the desire to claim kinship as between man and man, between the man standing in the ruck and the man standing apart on an eminence which others may not share with him. It is this human feeling and not merely the spur of curiosity that stimulates the desire for knowledge about the personal peculiarities of great men and women. The baser form of curiosity is usually satisfied with the knowledge of such important events as the donning and doffing of a royal hat, but men desire to know of the ways of men who are not great by the accident of birth, but in their own personal right, the rare gift of a divine afflatus. Between all men there is the bond of a common humanity, common frailties and a common mortality. And when some man towers above his fellows because he happens to have been touched by the magic wand of genius, men wish to assure themselves that he is still one of them, unlike them in some respects but very like them in others.

Of the millions that come and go in the never-ending procession of life and death the world retains no trace : a pinch of ashes here and a handful of dust there, dust unto dust. The earth covers the nameless legion with the mantle of oblivion. Not all : for now and again, out of this mass of vanishing humanity, some one leaves behind him some living thought, some deathless message, some creation of beauty that does not die, that eludes the death-grip of time, and pulses and throbs with life through the passing centuries. The two are easily detachable, the man who goes the way of all flesh and the achievement that does not depart. It is of such a man that we

wonderingly ask what manner of man was this that lived and died as other men and yet is living still deathless in death?

If it were not for the heritage left by such men humanity would be poor indeed with the stark poverty of a barren and arid past a flat and unstimulating present and a future without promise. Here in India millions who look upon Rama as an incarnation of God and utter his name living and dying are barely conscious of what they owe to the Rishi who composed the Ramayana. Those who speak of the principal characters in this sublimest of epics as mere myths do not understand that to a whole nation Rama is as real as the conception of the deity in many lands. History is a thing of yesterday and most of the great things happened long before history came to be written. The Ramayana is not merely a book to be read at leisure and to be put back on the shelf but it has been for more years than history can count an important part of the spiritual pabulum of one of the most ancient races of the world. Every stratum of Hindu society is penetrated through and through by the living influence of the story of the Ramayana. Rama intensely human in his trials and sufferings is an avatar whose divinity has never been questioned. Sita whose life story is a long drawn tragedy is the ideal of all womanhood for all time. Year after year the passion play of the Ramayana brings home to the mind of the humblest Hindu its power and pathos its idealism and its lofty teachings. And yet but for the Rishi bard Valmiki there would have been no Ramayana none of the characters which are as immortal as the gods. Beyond what is mentioned in the epic itself we know nothing about this earliest and greatest of poets. What again does the world know about Kalidasa the master singer who saw and depicted beauty as no other poet has done before or since? The man however great passes indistinguishable from the herd his work if it bears the hall mark of immortality endures.

And hence this human and normal interest in the latest Indian poet whose fame encompasses the world to-day whose

name is on every lip and whose likeness is to be found in a hundred thousand homes in every country in the world. No modern poet has ever attained such fame as has come to Rabindranath Tagore. There is scarcely any language in the world in which some of his works have not been translated, there is hardly any important city in the world in which his figure has not been seen and his voice has not been heard. He has moved as a classic writer whose place among the immortals is already assured. And everywhere men and women have waxed enthusiastic over the dignity and fascination of his personality. This is the appeal of the man to his fellow-men as distinguished from the impersonal appeal of genius apart from the man and unrestricted by limitations of time. A great man of genius may be physically unattractive, but in the case of this Bengali poet nature has been bountiful inside and out, and the distinction of the man is as remarkable as the genius of the poet is great. As he appears to-day, with the fine lineaments of his face and his silver locks, flowing beard and wonderful eyes he resembles a Rishi stepping out of a sylvan glade in ancient Aryavarta, or a patriarch full of wisdom moving in the sight of God. I can recall him as he looked when he was just twenty years of age, slender, tall, with his black hair curling down to his waist. He was fairly famous even then as a poet and an elegant prose-writer. I remember an eminent Bengali writer,* who died several years ago, then wrote about Rabindranath Tagore predicting a great future for him, but warning him against being carried away by the plaudits of the public. It was a rhetorical effusion addressed to "Brother Handclap" and entreating the said brother not to turn Rabindranath's head by excessive demonstrations of goodwill. I wonder what this writer would have thought if he had been living to-day and had been an eye-witness to the world-wide homage that has been the guerdon of the poet. Brother Hand-

* Akshay Chandra Sarkar.

clap has not succeeded in doing much damage to Rabindranath. As a matter of fact, an answer to this writer was anticipated in one of the early songs of the poet —

‘ Have I come into the world as a beggar for fame, to win handclaps by stringing words together? Who will awake to day, who will work, who wants to wipe out the shame of the Mother? ’

A few years later Bankim Chandra Chatterji, then the greatest writer in Bengali literature, and the author of the *Bande Mataram* song, suggested to Rabindranath that he should write an epic poem to establish his reputation as a poet. The reply came after some time in some beautiful lines addressed to the poet’s Muse as his beloved —

“ I had a mind to enter the lists for the composition of an epic poem but I do not know when my fancy struck your jingling bangles and broke into a thousand songs. Owing to that unexpected accident the epic poem, shattered into atoms, is lying at your feet ”

Nearly fifty years of comradeship may constitute some slight claim to an intimate knowledge of a man’s nature, though I am not so presumptuous as to imagine that it is of any advantage in measuring the poet’s genius. His works are accessible to all readers and competent critics either in the original or in translations and are already a part of the literature of the world. Still I have the memory of having listened to many poems and songs fresh from the pen of the poet and recited or sung in his matchless voice of many intimate rambles in the flower strewn fields of literature, of wide ranges of conversation. Many of the friends who forgathered with us are no more and as the sunset of life is coming on apace the lengthening shadows of the past are receding in the distance behind us. The years that have brought much fame for Rabindranath have also brought him many sorrows domestic bereavements of which the world knows nought.

Of school and university education Rabindranath has had no share. As a boy he attended school for a very short time, but his delicate and sensitive nature rebelled against the thoughtless indiscrimination which passes for discipline ; neither was the companionship of the average school-boy to his liking. He shook the dust of the school from his feet after a brief experience, but at home he was a careful and diligent student, and he began composing poetry at a very early age. He went to England as a young lad, but he did not attempt to qualify either for the Indian Civil Service or the Bar. He read, however, for some time with Mr. Henry Morley, who was much struck by the elegance and accuracy of Rabindranath's English composition. During his sojourn in England Rabindranath used to write Bengali letters, which were published, descriptive of his English experiences. For a lad in his teens the descriptions were remarkably vivid and showed considerable powers of observation. On his return to India two things were noticeable : he was entirely unaffected by his visit to England in his ways of living. He never put on the European dress and acquired no European habits. The other thing was that in spite of his undoubted command over the English language and his extensive reading of English literature he rarely wrote English. All his literary work and even his correspondence was done in Bengali. Until he began translating his own poems he had made no serious attempt to write in English, and now by his translations, his lectures and his letters he ranks as a great original English writer.

If genius is a capacity for taking infinite pains and hard and sustained work, the Indian poet has amply demonstrated it by his unswerving devotion to literature. Of course, the original spark must be there, for it is absurd to contend that genius is latent in every man and can be brought out by unremitting toil. You cannot delve down into the bowels of the earth anywhere at random to find a precious stone. Our

poet has fed the flame of his genius steadily and loyally and the light that he has kindled has penetrated as a gentle and illuminating radiance to the remotest corners of the earth. Poetry, drama and fiction have been enriched by his contributions and he has shed fresh lustre upon various departments of human thought. Nor has he been heedless to the call of his country though his temperament is unsuited for the din and jar of practical politics. He presided once over a political conference and delivered a profoundly thoughtful address in Bengal. When Bengal was embittered by the partition of that Province and feeling ran high the heart of the poet-patriot was deeply stirred and the songs he then composed were sung everywhere at public meetings and in processions by prisoners in prison vans and prison cells by women in the home and by boys in the streets. Two or three years later Rabindranath narrowly escaped having a signal political distinction conferred upon him by the Government of Bengal. He had read a certain paper in Bengali at a crowded meeting in Calcutta and it was published in the usual course. Shortly afterwards he received an official letter from Mr. Chief Secretary Macpherson conveying the warning of the Bengal Government against what was considered a seditious speech. The Government stayed their hand so far that they did not forthrightly launch a prosecution. Rabindranath told me that he sent no reply to this letter but though this little incident is not generally known it is well worth being recorded as the first official appreciation in India of the Indian poet. For some time the school established and maintained by Rabindranath at Bolpur and now known all over the civilised world as Visvabharati was under grave suspicion as a hotbed of sedition. It was a fair and accurate index of the working of the official mind in India.

A few more years passed and the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Rabindranath Tagore. How did this come about? The panels which make the selections for the

award of the various Nobel prizes are constituted of men who know nothing about the language in which the works of the Indian poet are written. It is contemptuously designated an Indian provincial vernacular language, as if every living language in the world is not the vernacular and the mother-tongue of some people. English may be a classical language, but we have not heard that the vernacular of England is Hebrew! All that the judges had before them was a thin volume in which the poet had rendered into English a few of his original poems in Bengali. It was not a metrical translation, but the spirit and soul of poetry were to be found in the marvellously musical and rhythmical lines. They disclosed a hitherto unrevealed subtlety of fascination in the English language with delicate nuances of the poet's own touch. Even so the judges could have scarcely realised that in going so far east as India and making a selection from a race ruled by a nation in Europe they were conferring a great honour upon the Nobel Prize itself, for in the list of Nobel prizemen no name stands higher to-day than that of Rabindranath Tagore.

A large and influential deputation from Calcutta waited upon the poet at Bolpur in his country home, well named the Abode of Peace to congratulate him on his having been awarded the Nobel Prize. In his reply the poet spoke with a shade of bitterness. Was not all his work done in his own country and were not his books accessible to all readers in Bengal? Those that had given him the Nobel prize had only seen a few of his poems in translation and did not know a word of the language in which they were originally written. The poet was right, for was it not humiliating that his countrymen in Bengal should have waited for the recognition of his genius to have come home all the way round from Europe? In the introduction, written about this time, to his valuable work, "A Study of Indo-Aryan Civilisation," Mr. Havell writes:— "If Anglo-India or the Calcutta University had awarded a

prize for literature open to the world neither would have discovered a Bengali poet. Unfortunately, it is a besetting weakness of our people that they see through other people's eyes and cannot always appreciate worth for its own sake. If a man gets a good Government appointment or some trumpery title, there is an epidemic of entertainments in his honour and he is acclaimed as a hero so long as the novelty of his distinction lasts. If not widely popular, the name of Rabindranath was a household word in Bengal even before the Nobel Prize was conferred upon him. His poems and specially his songs were known everywhere and there was not a single Bengali home in which his songs were not sung. The most striking tribute is that of imitation and this has been rendered to him in abounding measure for there is hardly any Bengali writer of verse who has not imitated Rabindranath's language, his metrical originality and versatility and his unmistakable distinction, though of course the supremacy of the Master remains undisputed. When he was fifty years of age his educated countrymen of Bengal made him a public presentation in the Town Hall of Calcutta, an honour which has not been shown to any other Bengali writer. Moreover, has it often happened that full and adequate appreciation has come to a great writer or a great man of genius in his own lifetime? Such a man lives in advance of his times and it takes time for later generations to arrive at a proper understanding of him. The world was not always the huge sounding board and the rounded whispering gallery it is to day and great books were written without the world hailing them as important literary events. Was not William Shakespeare an obscure individual in his lifetime and he lived only a little over three hundred years ago?

The Nobel Prize looms large in the world's estimation and yet one wonders whether a money prize is the best tribute to genius. For a struggling author the prize is a considerable sum of money and Rabindranath himself has

received letters inquiring how the Swedish prize for literature may be won. But while it is only about eight thousand pounds of English money, a heavy-weight boxing champion may earn a prize of eight hundred thousand dollars by having his head and face mashed into pulp! Rabindranath himself kept no part of the Nobel Prize money for his own use, but handed over the whole amount to the Visvabharati. Literary giants like the late Anatole France and George Bernard Shaw have refused to retain the money of the Nobel Prize for their personal use. But the present age is ruled by the almighty dollar and the greatest writers are those whose books are considered the best sellers in the market. Judged even by this standard Rabindranath easily holds the first place, for a single German firm has sold five million copies of some of his books. To borrow a phrase from the turf, it is the best stayer that wins a race, and the life of a book is to be measured not by its vogue for a season but by its passing the ordeal of time.

What detracts greatly from the intrinsic value of the Nobel Prize is that it is an annual award. How is it possible to discover a great name in literature every year when a century may pass without producing a really great writer? Consequently the prize has frequently to be given to mediocre writers whose reputation cannot be enhanced by any prize. It is somewhat like the appointment of a poet laureate in England. What great names besides those of Tennyson and Wordsworth are to be found in the list of English laureates? The royal seal and sign manual can create ministers and governors but not a poet who fills his place by right divine and holds a commission from God Himself. Lord Dewar, a master of epigram and perhaps the wittiest living after-dinner speaker, recently said at a dinner of an Institute of Painters in London, "Poets are born and not—paid." This fine epigram was garnished with a story about the present English Poet Laureate, who refused to give the press reporters an

interview when he happened to be in America some time ago. The next morning the New York papers came out with the attractive headline "The King's Canary Won't Chirp!" The King's canary is sometimes only a house sparrow faked to look like a canary but its chirp gives it away. Nor can a gift of money add to a poet's reputation. Money is here to-day and gone to-morrow and has no element of stability. Therefore in ancient Rome they crowned the poet and the man of genius with the laurel crown, a handful of evergreen leaves emblematic of the freshness and immortality of fame. It could be had for the mere plucking but not all the gold in the world can produce a single leaf of laurel.

Among the messages of congratulations received by the Indian poet there was one of genuine respect and homage from the late Mr E. S. Montagu then Under-Secretary and afterwards Secretary of State for India. At the next distribution of honours Rabindranath received a knighthood. There may or may not be some connection between these two incidents but it is a speculation of no interest. All that has to be noted is that the Government of the country displayed an interest in the poet on two occasions: first when they threatened him as a purveyor of sedition and the next time when they conferred upon him a knighthood in the wake of the Nobel prize. This is not the end of the story for there is a glorious sequel to it. When the Punjab lay prostrate under the iron heel of martial law, bruised, bleeding, outraged and martyred, the great patriot heart of Rabindranath went out in throbbing sympathy to his stricken countrymen in that Province and he cast away from him in indignant protest the knighthood with which he had been honoured. The letter that he wrote to Lord Chelmsford on that occasion will remain a historical and human document of a lofty and dignified protest couched in language of singular force and eloquence. And his decision has been accepted without question through

out the world, for no one now thinks of addressing him as a knight. What an object-lesson for many of our countrymen who cling to their petty titles and blazon them on their door fronts! By surrendering his title Rabindranath flung down his gauntlet as a challenge to oppression and it was a deed more truly knightly than the breaking of a lance in a joust of arms.

At different times it has been the privilege of genius to disregard the conventions of social life and to live amidst picturesque, bizarre surroundings. But the blandishments of Bohemia have never had the slightest attraction for Rabindranath Tagore. In his hermitage of peace, surrounded by the young Brahmachari scholars of the Visvabharati, the teachers and learned men from distant lands, he has brought back the atmosphere of the open-air teaching of the ancient Aryans. At Bolpur he is revered and addressed as Gurudeva just as the Rishis and teachers of ancient India were addressed by their disciples. To such of our countrymen as delight in the garb of the West and look upon England and Europe as the Mecca of their dreams, a visit to Bolpur may prove something of a shock. Time and again, the magnet of Rabindranath's personality has drawn famous and learned scholars of Europe to his academy. During their stay these learned pundits from the West discard the stiff and inelegant clothing of Europe for the graceful raiment of Bengal. But for the strange and humiliating obsession which is euphemistically called the cultural domination of Europe, no thought would have ever come to Indians of exchanging their own costumes for European clothing. There is so little imagination and such lack of individual choice in the West that practically all Europe and America have only a single kind of dress. Apart from climatic suitability, so far as western countries may be concerned, I can conceive of nothing more inartistic than the clothes of Europe with their close fit, straight lines and sharp angles, making a man look like a rectangle set upon two

straight lines. So great an authority as Thomas Alva Edison has condemned the garments of Europe and America without reserve on the ground that they cramp a man's movements and his life. On the other hand most Indian costumes are full of grace generously fashioned giving free movement to the limbs and falling in artistic curves and folds. There is no more attractive headdress anywhere than the turban of the Punjeb no upper garment so well proportioned or so suggestive of dignity as the robe worn in Northern India no costume so wholly beautiful as that of Bengal the *chadar* being an improvement on the Roman toga. I recollect two American ladies cultured and widely travelled whom I met in Calcutta telling me that they had nowhere seen so graceful a costume as that worn by the Bengalis in Calcutta. If any one were to ask me to change my national garb for any other in order to meet another man or woman of a different nationality either in society or at the dinner table it would be an insult to my sense of self respect and an affront to the ancient race from which I am proud to claim my descent. Rabindranath has written some spirited verses rebuking the penchant of some Indians for masquerading in European clothes. The robes that Rabindranath himself wears when travelling in foreign lands are distinguished by originality and individuality. There is probably no Indian living who is in deeper sympathy with the intellect of Europe or has better assimilated the finest literature of that continent but he has not made the mistake of accepting the husk for the kernel of European culture.

Does the Nobel prize afford an explanation of the wonderful reception accorded to Rabindranath Tagore in the West and the Far East? Rudyard Kipling the much belauded poet of the Empire is also a Nobel prizeholder. If he were to undertake a tour of the world would he be acclaimed in the same manner as the Indian poet? For Rabindranath the Nobel prize has served as an introduction to the West but that is

all. For the rest the Nobel prize has been of no more use to him than his cast-off knighthood. From continent to continent, country to country, capital to capital he has passed as a vision of light, East and West rendering him the obeisance due to a world-teacher. It has been a royal progress and Rabindranath has moved like a king, ay, a king of hearts playing with wizard fingers upon the heartstrings of the nations. The great ones of the world have vied with one another in doing him all possible honour, learned and intellectual men have received him as a leader and elder brother, the Universities have opened wide their doors in scholastic welcome, men and women have jostled one another for a sight of this poet and prophet from the East. He has lectured to crowded audiences in English which was subsequently translated into the local language. He has recited his poems in the original Bengali to hushed houses which listened, without understanding the words, to the music of his voice. In China, the representative of the dethroned Manchu dynasty presented him with an imperial robe. Everywhere and in all lands he has been greeted and acclaimed with an enthusiasm and a reverence of which the world holds no parallel.

Since at the moment we are concerned more with the man than with the poet, it may be fittingly asked whether apart from his great gifts Rabindranath has any claim to greatness. The answer is, strip him of his God-given dower of song, even as he himself has laid aside his man-made title of distinction, take away from him his treasure of wisdom garnered during the years, and still he is great—great in his lofty character, great in the blameless purity of his life, great in his unquenchable love for the land of his birth, undeniably great in his deep and earnest religiousness and the faith that rises as an incense to his Maker. As a mere man he is an exemplar whom his countrymen, in all reverence and all humility, may well endeavour to follow.

As a poet Rabindranath has won wider celebrity than any poet in his own lifetime. His works or parts of them are familiar to most readers in Europe Asia and America. The best translations in English are by himself and these have been translated into other languages. Critics in Europe and America almost without exception have bestowed high praise on his writings and ranked him among the great poets of the world. Occasionally the criticism is shallow specially when the Indian poet has been compared to some European poet. A comparison between two writers in two different languages may have the merit of suggestion but it is not helpful to constructive criticism. A critic who undertakes such a comparison must satisfy his readers that he has read both writers in the original with full understanding. I doubt whether any European critic can make such an assertion in regard to the poetical writings of Rabindranath Tagore. An English admirer residing for some time in India of the poet claims to have read him in the original Bengali and he considers the Indian writer in some respects superior to Victor Hugo. He has not however thought of comparing the poet to any English writer. If an Indian critic were to make such a comparison he should be asked whether he had read the works of Victor Hugo in the original French. The similarity between the French and the Indian writers is in their versatility and range of creative genius. Both are masters of prose and verse both are writers of prose fiction both have written dramatic and lyrical poetry both are child lovers and have tendered the homage of exquisite song to the sovereignty of childhood. There the comparison ends and it can be carried no further because the two writers belong to two widely divergent schools. Tennyson rightly called Victor Hugo Stormy Voice of France. The great French poet was Lord of human tears but he was in his element in the *Sturm und Drang* of nature and human passions. French of the French he smote and withered Napoleon.

Le Petit with the flail and fire of his scorn and his burning philippics in prose and verse. He nicknamed Napoleon III the Little in contrast with Napoleon the Great. The muse of the Indian poet moves in the glory of early dawn and seeks the gathering shadows of evening. She finds her pleasure, not in the storm and stress, but in the smiling beauties, of nature. She haunts the moonlight and strays in the ripe and waving corn. She listens to the voice of the sandal-scented wind from the south and knocks gently at the door of the human heart.

This comparison is in a measure helpful in that it suggests the range and limitations of these two poets and also indicates certain other features that may be profitably borne in mind. Industry is inseparable from genius but is not by itself a proof of original creative powers. Similarly, versatility may be a sign of brilliance but not necessarily of genius. There was a Spanish writer who wrote five hundred books and this is all that is remembered about him for his books have been forgotten. It is not by the quantity but the quality of their writings that the French and the Bengali poets have become famous. The genius of Victor Hugo was not only dramatic but even melodramatic. He was a master of what Sir Walter Scott called 'the big bow-wow style.' Rabindranath in his later writings has touched spiritual heights seldom reached by any poet. When Rabindranath and Victor Hugo are named together we have to remember that there is music in the trickle of the rill and the gurgle of the spring and there is music also in the rush of the rapid and the thunder of the cataract.

In the case of a great poet or writer contemporary judgment may not always be in agreement with the ultimate verdict of posterity. A man standing close to the foot of a mountain cannot form a correct estimate of its height or its imposing position in the landscape. Similarly, a certain perspective of time is necessary for an accurate appreciation of

a great original writer or creative genius. But the faculty of criticism has grown with the development of literature and we cannot expect the suspension of contemporary judgment in the case of any writer great or small. That judgment as regards the Indian poet is entirely gratifying and will be endorsed by future generations of critics. Rich and varied as is the output of Rabindranath's literary work, he stands pre-eminent as a lyric poet. The world of readers outside his own province of Bengal knows him only through the medium of translations. Poetry divides itself easily into three main sections: epic, dramatic and lyric, the three clearly demarcated and separated by wide stretches of time and the evolution of the human intellect. Of these epic poetry is somewhat easy of translation because its essence is narrative. Some loss is unavoidable in translation but the outlines and central structure of an epic can be retained even in a new language. Drama is more difficult but the excellent renderings into English of the powerful Greek tragedies prove that the difficulties of translation are not insuperable. A fine lyrical poem is the despair of the translator. A great epic is fashioned in a Titanic mould of which a cast may be taken. A drama is a panoramic view of human nature and may be copied. But a beautiful lyric is a sparkling little jewel of which every facet is carefully cut by the poet-jeweller and its setting is the language in which it is composed. Any duplication or imitation of such a gem may prove to be mere paste. To be fully appreciated a lyrical poem must be read in the original with due understanding of the language in which it is written. It is a compact and component whole from which no part can be separated from another. The words, the figures, the metre are all wedded together. Rabindranath has translated his poems as no one else could have done but how is it possible to convey in another language the grace, the metrical arrangement and the musical harmony of the words of the original poems?

It can scarcely be expected that readers and admirers in far lands will learn the language of Bengal to read the works of the Bengali poet as originally written. India itself is a land of many languages and outside Bengal Indian readers have to read the English translations of the poet. I remember several years before Rabindranath received the Nobel prize. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, politician and mathematician, learned the Bengali language for the express purpose of reading Rabindranath's poems in the original Bengali. Gokhale read out to me a few poems on one occasion, apologising for his inability to reproduce the Bengali accent and enunciation, and then asked me to read the same poems in the manner of a Bengali. However wide-flung his fame, Rabindranath's permanent place is in the literature of his own language. As a Bengali free from a few delusions, I recognise that Bengali literature does not rank as one of the great literatures of the world, though it is full of promise and has already produced a few writers of undoubted genius. Periods of literary activity have alternated with long spells of stagnation. There have been a very few critics of outstanding ability but critical acumen has not been systematically and conscientiously cultivated. The little criticism that is to be found is either shallow, or mordant, which passes for smartness, or indiscriminating and fulsome adulation. When Rabindranath was a young boy criticism by comparison was rampant in Bengal, and every writer of any note was compared to some English writer. Early Bengali literature was neglected. The Vaishnava poems of the era of Chaitanya, the cradle and crown of the lyrical poetry of Bengal, were consigned to the oblivion of cheap and obscure printing presses. The boy Rabindranath turned to this literature with the unerring instinct of nascent genius. As a boy-poet he wrote a number of charming poems in imitation of the language of Vidyapati, a Maithil poet by birth and the language of his verse, but also a Bengali poet by adoption and extensive imitation during the

period Bengali poetry was influenced by the personality of Chaitanya

As the pinions of his genius grew stronger the poet soared higher and ranged wider. The supreme art of simplicity was his to begin with, and he rapidly acquired considerable depth of thought and a rare strength and delicacy of touch. There was very little variety in rhythm metre and measure in Bengali poetry, though the great poet Michael Madhusudhan Dutt had introduced blank verse and a few simple new metres. Rabindranath dazzled his readers by his creative faculty of introducing new metres and measures. Tripping verses nimble footed as Terpsichore, slow, dreamy measures caught in the land of the lotus eaters, long swinging stately lines of regal grace, stirring lays of knightly deeds and martyr-heroes, lofty chants from ancient Aryan and Buddhist legendary lore, holy hymns rising like hosannas from the shrine of the soul, all were his and his muse answered every compelling call. His language is of classical purity and dignity, and of striking originality. Critics everywhere have been struck by his wealth of simile and metaphor, the subtlety of perception and suggestion, the realisation of the beautiful. His devotional songs and poems are among the finest in the whole range of literature. They are a noble and melodious expression of a living faith beautiful in its strength and sublime in its appeal. His lyrical poems are of steadily progressive strength and variety, and the careful student can detect the successive stages of development the growing maturity of thought and expression the increasing power over language and rhyme, and the splendid outburst of music in several of his later poems. Without attempting anything like an exhaustive criticism or appreciation of the poet I may quote a single poem displaying some of the qualities which have placed Rabindranath in the front rank of lyric poets. This poem was composed when the poet was about thirty four years of age, in the full plenitude of his powers

and the assured strength of his genius. The theme is *Urvashi*. This poem scintillates and glitters like the Kohinoor in the poet's Golconda of flawless jewels of the finest water:—

Nor mother, nor maid, nor bride art thou,
 O beauteous *Urvashi*, dweller in the garden of the gods!
 When Eve comes down on the mead drawing the
 golden end of her garment round her weary shape,
 Thou dost not light the evening lamp in a corner of
 any home ;
 With the faltering feet of doubt, trembling bosom
 and downcast eyelids,
 Smiling and coy, thou dost not pass to the bridal bed
 In the still midnight.
 Unveiled as the rise of the dawn
 Unembarrassed art thou !

Like a flower without a stem blooming in itself
 When didst thou blossom, *Urvashi*?
 Out of the churned sea thou didst rise in the primal
 spring-morn
 With the chalice of ambrosia in thine right hand,
 the poison cup in thy left :
 Like a serpent charm-stilled the mighty ocean wave-tost
 Sank at thy feet bending its million heaving hoods
 In obeisance,
 White as the *Kunda* flower, in beauty undraped, the
 lord of the gods bowing before thee,
 Fair art thou !

Wast thou never a budding maiden tender in years,
 O *Urvashi*, of youth eterne?
 In the dark vault under the sea, sitting lone in whose abode
 Didst thou play with rubies and pearls the games of
 childhood ;

On heaven's mountain crest of sunrise thou art

Aurora embodied.

O Urvasi, the charmer of the world !

The slenderness of thy form is washed with the

tears of the world.

Painted is the pink of thy feet with the heart.

blood of the three worlds.

O thou with thy hair unbound, ungarmented ! on

the open lotus-flower

Of the world's desire thou hast poised thy lotus feet

Ever so light!

In the whole heaven of the mind endless is thy delight.

O companion of dreams!

Hark ! all around earth and heaven are crying for thee.

O cruel, heedless Urvasi !

Will the pristine and ancient of cycles come back

to the earth.

From the fathomless, shoreless sea, wet-tressed,

wilt thou rise again?

First will that form appear in that first morn.

All thy limbs will weep hurt by the eyes of the universe.

Dripping the water from thy loveliness.

On a sudden the great ocean will heave and roll

To a song unsung before.

Never again, never again! That moon of glory has set.

On the mount of the sunset dwells Urvashi.

So on the earth to-day in the burst of joy of the spring

Whose long-drawn sigh of parting eternal comes

mingled with the notes of mirth?

On the night of the full-moon when all around is

full laughter

Whence come the tunes distraught of the lute of

distant memory?

The tears flow in flood
 Still hope keeps awake in the weeping of the heart
 O thou without bonds!

In the original Bengali text the metre of this poem is original the language is full of artistic grace and the instinct of the true poet is to be repeatedly found in the choice of the words. Words like *Kampra* trembling *Ushasi* dawn *Tanima* slenderness and *Sonima*, redness delightfully musical are rarely met with in Bengali poetry. In one line occurs the word *Krandasi* heaven and earth. How many Bengali readers of the poet know the meaning of this word or have troubled themselves to trace its origin? It cannot be found in any Bengali dictionary or even an average Sanskrit dictionary. It is an archaic Sanskrit word and occurs in three places in the Rig veda in the second sixth and tenth *mandalas*. The meaning of the word is two contending armies shouting defiance but in the commentary of Sayanacharya it is noted that it also means heaven and earth. It is in this sense that the word has been used by the poet in this poem. This will give an idea of the wide and accurate scholarship of the poet and his artistic selection of appropriate words.

Urvasi is an epithet of the dawn personified as an *apsara* a heavenly nymph the principal danseuse in Indra's heaven. The Aryan Greek Roman and Islamic conceptions of paradise are a perpetuation of the lower forms of the pleasures of life on earth. The paradise of the North American Indian is the happy hunting ground for he cannot think of a heaven without the pleasures of the chase. Incidents relating to *Urvasi* are frequently mentioned in ancient Sanskrit books. According to our poet among the objects and beings that rose from the sea when it was churned by the gods and the demons with the mount *Mandar* for a churning rod and the great serpent *Vasuki* for a churning rope *Urvasi* was one. We need not pause to enquire whether this conception of the poet is

strictly accurate according to the mythological legends. I accept it for the purpose of my observations. This splendid allegory crystallises some dim and remote tradition about some stupendous convulsion of nature, may be an unparalleled seismic disturbance, a mighty volcanic eruption, the emergence of a vast tract of land from the sea or the submergence of some forgotten continent like Atlantis. In Greek mythology, which is largely a reflex of Aryan mythology, Aphrodite, named Venus in Roman mythology, rose from the sea-foam in which she was born. The Sanskrit legend explains how the sea was churned into foam by a Titanic process. Aphrodite unlike Urvashi does not represent the dawn, but the Greek word for daybreak, *eos*, is etymologically very similar to the Sanskrit word for dawn, *usha*.

In all the ancient accounts relating to Urvashi there is nothing that appeals to the finer feelings. There is the fascination, irresistible to saint and sinner alike, of an unearthly, and fadeless beauty. In the tenth *mandala* of the Rig Veda there is a dialogue between Pururava and Urvashi. The story is told in fuller detail in the Satapatha Brahmana, the Bhagavata and is mentioned in several other books. In the Mahabharata the third Pandava, Arjuna, who rejected Urvashi's advances, was cursed by her. For a short spell she was the wife of King Pururava and in dramatising this incident in Vikramorvasi the poet Kalidasa represents her as a loving and attractive woman. But the modern poet has restored Urvashi to the spirit world and interpreted her with an inspiration so sympathetic and elevating as to reveal her in a new light. As one reads and understands this poem, he realises the sublimation of Urvashi from the low level of sense to the height of supersense. She no longer appears merely as the radiant but heartless ravisher of hearts, a much-magnified, if elusive, type of the scarlet woman. Any conception of the eternal feminine, whether in the flesh or in the spirit, is incomplete without the three stages of maidenhood, widowhood and motherhood, and

this is the first note sounded by the poet while apostrophising Urvasi. Fronting the universe unshrinking in the freshness and glory of the first dawn of creation Urvasi stands in the splendour of her beauty with the glint of the young sunlight on her loveliness.

And this image recalls the new legend of her first manifestation for there is no word about her birth anywhere though the parentage of the gods can be easily traced in the elaborate theogony of Sanskrit sacred literature with its imposing setting. Behold the gods and their opponents with their muscles showing like corded steel heaving and straining and pulling at either end of the straightened but writhing coils of the mightiest of serpents trampling the golden strand under their giant feet the massive bulk of mount Mandar whirling each way by turn with the broad speckled bands of the length of the serpent Ananta enfolding its girth the cosmic ocean lashed and racked and churned into hissing hydraheaded foam! And behind this travail and turmoil is the background of the calm and smiling rose flush of the dawn! On this scene of mingled strife and peace appears Urvasi parting the waters and the foam her hair dripping and clinging to the rounded curves and the slender lines of her peerless form the vision of her beauty striking the godly and ungodly beholders dumb with amazement!

For centuries poets and dramatists and other writers accepted this conception of Urvasi without question. There was no suggestion of any flaw in the myth or anything lacking in the imagination that invested the nymph with perennial youth. But the latest of the great poets of India has noted the gap in the life story of Urvasi. We see her suddenly revealed to the astonished eyes of the universe in the maturity of her lissome grace the immortal gift of her beauty and her fatal fascination but nothing is known of the innocence of her early youth of her playfulness as a child or the arms that rocked her to sleep in a gilded chamber in some submarine

palace. And hence the wondering question of the poet concerning the missing infancy of Urvasi. The original legend is undoubtedly a daring figment revelling in the creation of full-grown beauty, skipping the stages between childhood and maturity. In Judaic tradition and the Book of Genesis the first man and woman were never infants. But the loss to the being or the spirit so created is immeasurable. What beauty of person or consciousness of strength can compensate for the void inseparable from the absence of the lights and shadows of the vista of memory, recollections of the past to fill moments of idleness or preoccupation?

This is the emphasis on the word 'only' (*sudhoo*) when the poet says Urvasi has been for ages the beloved of the whole universe. Her appeal is the disturbing influence of beauty alone without the lighter shades of the memory of an innocent childhood. It is the puissance of sheer beauty shattering the concentrated contemplation of the saint and filling all the worlds with the ache of youth and maddening the fancy of the poet. But she, the creator of all this commotion, the dancer with the jingling anklets making music to her footfall, flits as she will, gay, heartwhole, fancy-free. It is when she dances before the assembled gods on the sapphire floor of the ball-room in Indra's palace with all the abandon and witchery of her art that the poet lifts the veil from the mystery of her identity and reveals her as the spirit of beauty behind the phenomena of nature. The rhythmic waves of the sea keep measure to her dancing feet, the tremors of the agitated earth are communicated to the heads of corn, the heart of man is strangely and inexplicably disturbed. The falling meteor is a jewel burst from the chain round Urvasi's neck in the mad whirl of her dance, the lambent lightning with its wavy lines is the broken strand of the lustrous girdle round her waist. Urvasi is the expression of all the buoyant, spontaneous joyance of Nature!

Still further behind is the Vedic myth, though even there the identity of Urvasi with the Morning Dawn and the Evening Twilight is very faint and the allegory is more or less lost in the proper name. In hailing her as the embodiment of dawn in heaven the poet greets her on the threshold of early tradition and yet finds in her the fulfilment of the later and wilder myths cleansed from the grosser accretions of later times. The morning dew in which the dawn is bathed represents the tears of the world while the tinge of rose with which the delicate feet of Urvasi are painted by the rays of the morning sun is the heart blood of all the worlds. As the lotus which remains closed at night opens its heart to the first touch of the sun, so the longing and the desire of the universe opens out as a lotus flower on which the dainty sun-kissed feet of Urvasi may rest. The image of beauty that haunts the dreams of the world is the all-pervading loveliness of Urvasi.

Will the revolving cycles bring back the ancient and pristine era when Urvasi rose from the sea which hailed her with a new song of welcome? Will a wondering world again witness what the gods saw? Will the wailing cry of heaven and earth reach Urvasi and turn her tripping feet back to the scene of her first triumphs? Vain alas is the weeping and yearning for the lost Urvasi! How can the beauty and the glory of the first dawn of creation ever return? Is it not recorded in the Rig Veda* that Urvasi told Pururava 'I have gone from thee like the first of Mornings. I like the wind am difficult to capture?' Urvasi is not the nymph of the daily recurrent dawn. She 'came from the waters flashing brilliant as the falling lightning bringing delicious presents for Pururava'†. Gone is she with the glory of the first of Mornings, leaving behind her the memory of a vanished beauty such as has never again been seen on earth or in heaven and her parting

* Rig Veda, X, 95

† Ibid

sigh comes floating in the festive season of springtide as an undernote of melancholy!

And so we see Urvashi again, ancient as the Vedas in recorded language and far more ancient in mythic tradition, uplifted and purified, stepping forth as she did when she rent the veil of uncreated, brooding gloom and looked out on the universe in the soft dawnlight, wondering and wondered at, passing fair, winning unsought the adoration of immortals and mortals. The fame of the poet, to whose genius we owe this new presentation of the world-old Urvashi, has been broadcast round the world by the wireless of human appreciation conveyed in many tongues, and if we claim him as our own it is with the knowledge that he belongs also to the world and his is the one form of wealth which grows with the giving. Let ours be the portion of sharing the glad gratefulness of giving, of adding to the joy and light of the world. .

MEGALOMANIA IN LITERATURE

MEGALOMANIA IN LITERATURE

PHYSICIANS diagnose megalomania as a disease, sometimes symptomatic of a terrible malady. Apart from a medical prognosis, megalomania, or the delusion of power and greatness, such as that possessed William II of Germany and was the cause of his undoing, is not uncommon. It may be a very aggravated form of egoism, a hypertrophy which is colloquially known as a swelled head. It has been hardly noticed that this disease of the mind has been finding free vent in literature for a considerable time.

The part that literature plays in human affairs and human thought is a considerable one. It is not merely an intellectual stimulant. The highest creative literature has been known to permeate life itself. The great epics, dramas, romances and works of fiction often exercise a powerful influence on human conduct and human ideals. Our judgment of such works is limited by our knowledge. It is comparatively recently that European scholars have become aware of the existence of an important literature outside Europe. Even now such knowledge is confined to a very few people. Man's quest for all things that appeal to the higher faculties is narrow. To Europeans Europe represented the whole world just as the Aryans thought there was nothing worth knowing outside India. The Greeks looked upon Hellas as the land favoured by the gods and the Romans proudly declared Rome to be the hub of the world. Homer was and probably still is regarded as the greatest epic poet of the world. I am not sure whether the majority of Englishmen do not regard Milton greater than Dante, or the Germans do not look upon Goethe as greater than Shakespeare. It may be due to a similar

weakness that we Indians retain the conviction that Valmiki and Vyasa are the greatest poets that the world has yet known

There is however a touchstone for literature as well as for gold and any great book may be put to the test. When a book or the author of that book is designated immortal it means that the book exercises a living influence upon living men. The epics of Homer are as well known to-day as when they were sung or chanted by the wandering bard in the streets and homes of some forgotten town in ancient Greece. From Greece they have passed to the possession of the world. The names of Agamemnon and Achilles, Hector and Patroclus, the wanderings and adventures of Ulysses are now known in every part of the world. But great as the poems undoubtedly are, they are valued mainly as high literature with all the grandeur associated with true epic poetry. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are beyond question the beginning of all literature in ancient and modern Europe. It may be noted in passing that among the many theories about the personality and identity of Homer one is that the word is derived from *homereos* which means a collector. Turning to ancient Sanskrit literature we find that the author of the *Mahabharata*, Vyasa, is also believed to have been a collector because of the multiplicity of the works attributed to his authorship. The speculation itself is unprofitable because nothing can be accurately ascertained about Vyasa and Homer and whether they were the authors or compilers of the great epics they have left a heritage which is as real as it is priceless. But if we compare the epics of Homer with the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* we can at once realise that the ideal of the Aryan poet is higher than the Greek ideal. Penelope is certainly an ideal wife, faithful to the wandering Ulysses and the inventor of a womanly and ingenious device to put off her importunate suitors. Sita was placed in a much worse position but she passed through the ordeal without scathe. To millions of women in this

country she is not only a goddess, but the highest paragon of a true and faithful wife. It is only in India that we find the legends and myths of early Sanskrit literature interwoven into the web of Indian life and thought. In Europe the interest in ancient literature is detached and impersonal; there is no continuity of tradition; the modern Greeks or Italians have nothing in common with the ancient Greeks and Romans; the most important break is the change of religion, and probably the good Christians in Greece and Italy designate Homer and Hesiod, Virgil and Ovid, pagans. In India men and women still cling to the ancient faith. Religion has passed through various phases, but there has been no radical change. The heroes and heroines of the Sanskrit epics are still the ideals of the Hindu race; many of the legends have been put to practical application. The birth anniversary of Krishna is still a national festival throughout India. Hindu women still perform the *Savitri Vrata*, in memory of the faithful Savitri, who won back the life of her dead husband from King Yama (Pluto) himself. The stories of the two epics with the numerous minor legends intertwined with them have been sources of perennial inspiration to later poets and dramatists. There is no other literature in the world which has filled so large a space in the life, religion and thoughts of a nation.

Evidence of a sense of racial superiority has been sought in the *Ramayana* in that part of the narrative in which an aboriginal race inhabiting the southern part of the peninsula has been designated a race of anthropoid apes. These formed the allies of Rama and the army with whose help he vanquished and killed Ravana, the demon king of Ceylon, and rescued Sita from captivity. It is impossible to judge what was at the back of the poet's mind, but certainly there is no contempt for the monkey-army and the leaders among them. Hanuman was the most devoted and zealous follower of Rama. He discovered Sita in the wood where she was kept

a prisoner and he is worshipped as the monkey god to this day. Others were gallant fighters and their unselfish devotion to Rama and the part they played in the rescue of Sita were beyond all praise. There is not a word anywhere to show that these heroic and generous friends and followers of Rama at a time when he and his brother Lakshmana were exiles and wanderers upon the face of the earth were despised or treated with contumely. Any race or tribe would be proud to have such a record.

In later times when the age of the drama appeared in Sanskrit literature the consciousness of the superiority of the Aryan race became manifest. Sanskrit drama is singularly free from coarse or vulgar language or expletives. Oaths cannot be found in the dialogues even when the speakers belong to the lower ranks of society. The severest term of abuse is either a son or a daughter of a slave. These ancient Aryans were clearly a clean minded people who never used foul language. But there is a sharp distinction between an Arya and an Anarya (non Aryan). When a woman is addressed in indecorous language she flashes out the retort 'you speak like an Anarya'. Contempt is concentrated in that one word. An Arya must be incapable of anything unworthy, undignified or unbecoming. He must be true to the teachings and traditions of his race. One who is not an Arya may be different. But it is only rarely that we come across such remarks and only in some dramas there is no insistence on the superiority of the Aryan race, no obsession of greatness, no universal contempt for other races. The great poets and dramatists were full of their own high art and seldom treated of trivial things or feelings.

Ancient Greek literature is also free from any insistence on the superiority of the Greek race. The great epics treat of war and adventure, the famous tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles and Seneca mostly treated of the mythologies of the different parts of Greece while the

comedies of Aristophanes lashed the vices of the age with the hand of a master. Literature was not used as a medium for the assertion of national superiority, and even the Helots, who were slaves, were let alone. The Romans were the proudest among the ancient nations, but their best literature is not tainted by expressions of contempt for other peoples.

The bar sinister of colour was first introduced in literature by Shakespeare but without the slightest reflection upon the man of colour. If Othello was a Moor he belonged to a race which had left its stamp of sovereignty upon parts of Europe. In the beginning of the eighth century the Moors invaded Spain and they overran the whole country except the Asturias and it was not till the end of the fifteenth century that they were expelled finally from the country. The remnants of their splendid architecture are still to be seen in the south of Spain. A whole nation of Europe was conquered by a Negroid race and the white people had to live under the rule of a black race. It is not ancient history even now and it was quite fresh in the time of Shakespeare. The tradition of the Moors as a nation of warriors and conquerors appealed to the imagination of the dramatist who knew no distinction between black and white, but who knew that human nature was the same everywhere, whatever the colour of the skin. Othello is a noble and chivalrous character, but there is a weak joint in every armour and the green-eyed monster of jealousy blinded Othello and led him to the crime of wife-murder. His Ancient, Iago, who warned him against jealousy while feeding that passion with diabolical cunning, was a Greek, a 'Spartan dog' as Lodovico calls him in passionate anger at the end of the double tragedy of the deaths of Desdemona and Othello. We feel pity for Othello's weakness and sympathy for the wreck of his newly wedded happiness, but no contempt for his essentially lofty character. He was descended from a royal line as he said, 'I fetch my life and being from men of royal siege,' and some of the

noblest words in the drama are put into his mouth. When accused of having won Desdemona's love by witchcraft he made a straightforward soldierly statement showing how he had unconsciously wooed his wife by recounting to her his deeds of valour and how her admiration had mellowed into love —

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd
And I lov'd her that she did pity them
This only is the witchcraft I have us'd

Tortured by the venom of jealousy injected into his veins in ever increasing doses by the arch poisoner, Iago, Othello exclaims in the ascending intensity of a dramatic passion that his martial occupation is gone —

Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O farewell!

* * * *

The Royal banner and all quality
Pride pomp and circumstance of glorious war!

* * * *

Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

And when the fair Desdemona lay before him, the breath of her life stifled by his own hands and Othello was convinced of her innocence by the whiplash of Emilia's tongue, how magnificent and despairing is the outburst of his grief!

O! cursed cursed slave Whip me ye devils
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!
Oh! Oh! Oh!

Finally, there are the great words uttered just before the self-inflicted blow that laid him by the side of Desdemona in death :—

I pray you

* * * *

Speak of me as I am ; nothing extenuate
Nor set down aught in malice.

Iago had a white skin but the blackest of hearts. He calls Othello ' an old black ram ' behind his back but admits to Roderigo the nobility of Othello's nature :—

The Moor, howbeit I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature.

So great a poet as Shakespeare cannot be swayed by considerations of race or colour, for his genius is a mirror in which the whole range of human nature is impartially reflected. The highest creative art is invariably impersonal. Moreover, England never dreamed of an Empire in the lifetime of Shakespeare. He died in 1616 ; in 1614 Sir Thomas Roe was sent as an ambassador to the court of the Great Moghul and the dazzling magnificence of the Moghul Empire must have convinced him of the insignificance of the little island kingdom in North Europe. Shakespeare was merely universal ; the young imperial idea was taught to shoot much later.

In a Victorian poet like Tennyson the pride of race finds full vent in a poem like " The Defence of Lucknow " and the heroic character of the British defenders is extolled to the skies. To this no exception can be taken, as it is natural for a poet to feel pride in the gallantry of his countrymen. In the heroic defence of the Residency at Lucknow the Indian

This attitude of the superiority of race became more and more noticeable in western literature until it found triumphant expression in Rudyard Kipling, who was hailed as one of the immortals and was promptly awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. As a young man he served as an assistant on the editorial staff of the *Civil and Military Gazette* and the *Pioneer*, at Lahore and Allahabad. He had never anything to do with Bengal or the Bengalis and yet his most envenomed writings were directed against people belonging to that race. He has been rightly dubbed the Poet of the Empire, for the imperialist is an insufferable egoist whose head strikes the stars and who looks down upon the world as peopled by pigmy races, he alone and his countrymen towering over the rest as giants. No imperialist can ever be a true poet or a great dramatist, for real humanism cannot be bounded by race or colour, and it is the privilege of supreme genius to obliterate all narrow limitations. The designation of the Poet of the Empire carries its own condemnation for such a poet can never be a world-poet. It is only an imperialist that can outrage human nature by such a sentiment as 'the East is East and the West is West, and the twain shall never meet,' or the apparently sanctimonious but really blasphemous doctrine about the White Man's Burden. If the lawless possession of another man's liberty and his property can be called a burden, why does the white man squeal out in terror when his liberty and property are in jeopardy? The memory of the four years ending in 1918 is not yet so far distant that there is any difficulty in recalling it. The only fine note that Rudyard Kipling has struck is in "Recessional."

The perpetual amusement that is found in the manufacture of 'Baboo English' made in England or Anglo-India shows a woeful lack of the sense of humour in literature. If specimens of Anglo-Indian Bengali or Hindustani could be collected the laugh would be on the other side; for Englishmen spend thirty or forty years in India without ever learning

to speak any Indian language decently and as to writing they never learn anything at all. As linguists the purveyors of Baboo English are nowhere.

Overwhelming evidence of a boundless racial vanity is to be found in the literature and periodicals of the West particularly among the English speaking races. If you wish to see the double of a reigning sovereign in Europe, one who can pass for the king himself unrecognised by his ministers and subjects you have only to look out for a likely Englishman. The fact that these conceits are to be found in works of fiction makes no difference in the habit of the mind the viewpoint of the writers. If an Egyptian or Turkish beauty living in the seclusion of the purdah happens to fall in love who is the fortunate individual favoured by her? Why a European of course. If there is a damsel in distress captured by a Sheik or abducted by savages the knight who rushes to her rescue is invariably an Englishman braver than Bayard or the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. If one wishes to see a single man scattering a whole crowd as chaff before the wind he has merely to read a story in an English monthly magazine. And this perpetual self exaltation goes hand in hand with the most withering contempt for other nations mingled with wholesale and sweeping calumny. If the hero is invariably a European the villain is either an Asiatic an African or a Mexican. A frequent foil to a noble and heroic Englishman is a Chinaman. To judge by the pictures presented in the shilling shockers and accounts of sensational adventures in the magazines a Chinaman would appear to be the last word in crime and low cunning. One of Rudyard Kipling's books is devoted to grossly maligning a Bengali. The law is being amended to penalise newspaper attacks on prophets and saints but there is no law to prevent or punish the calumny of whole nations in books and stories. There has been a recent instance of such a book being made part of a propaganda for political purposes but

the deliberate and conscious offender may not be a victim of a malady of the mind. A book like "Mother India" may be a cold, calculated thing, perpetrated with deliberation and defended with brazen effrontery, the vinegary output of a shrewish mind combined with sterility of all notions of justice and appreciation.

Much of this literature of beating the big drum on one's own door-step is fugitive. Most of it is turned out by the printing press to be thrown into the bottomless wastepaper-basket of oblivion, but the mind at the back of it persists. So irresistible has become the obsession of race and colour that the phrase 'a white man' has become a synonym for every virtue under the sun. It may be contended that the phrase 'a white man' is used in a metaphorical sense like 'a white lie,' but all virtues are practically a monopoly of Europeans. You may read in any trashy story in a periodical that Dick, Tom or Harry proved to be a white man; in other words, he had not only a white skin, but he was truthful, honourable, chivalrous and possessed of all the virtues. It might just as well be said that he had descended straight from heaven, nimbus and wings and all! It is megalomania, stark and unashamed, finding outrageous expression in language. The coiners of this phrase never paused to think, because they had lost the power of discrimination, that if a white man possessed all the virtues the converse also must have been true, namely, that the brown, black or yellow man had no virtues. No man in the possession of his senses would dare to make such a preposterous statement, and the assertion about a white man is proof positive of literary megalomania.

As a student and admirer of all that is best in English literature I wish to make it clear that I have dealt with a certain class of writers only, who have brought the noble aim and purpose of literature into disrepute. The pride of race and skin and the intoxication of imperialism have unhinged the mind and upset the balance of judgment and the

catholicity of sympathy inseparable from high class literature so far have this obliqueness of vision and the warping of the intellect advanced that they have encroached upon legitimate literature. I have recently had an occasion to see a book entitled 'Rabindranath Tagore, Dramatist and Poet,' by E. J. Thompson. It is a thesis which has won for the writer a Doctorate in Philology from the University of London as well as a chair in the Oxford University as a Lecturer in Bengali. It is outside my purpose to attempt a review of this book or to examine the writer's knowledge of the Bengali language. He has read the Bengali poet in the original and translated several of his poems. He has attempted an elaborate and detailed criticism of several works of the poet, whom he ranks among the world poets. Since he owes both his degree and his appointment to his criticism—whatever may be its value—of the writings of the Indian poet, it would be absurd for him to assume an attitude of superiority towards the poet. In the main, his attitude is generally correct but there are lapses which can only be explained by a mental pose of superiority. I do not say it is conscious or deliberate, but there is unmistakable evidence that the English critic, who spent several years in India as the Principal of a missionary college thinks that he can teach the Indian poet a thing or two. It may be that Mr Thompson is somewhat handicapped by the habit of teaching in the class room for habit has an awkward tendency to become second nature but in several passages of the book the schoolmaster seems to be very much abroad and to have lost his bearings. As an illustration I shall quote a single passage from Mr Thompson's book —

"If he (Rabindranath Tagore) had been able to study such works as (say) Dr Bradley's discussion of the reasons for the failure of the long poem in Wordsworth's age or Dr Bridges's careful appraisement of Keats's odes relative among themselves I think he might have been an even greater poet and avoided faults which flaw and crack his beauty far

more deeply than mere repetition does, annoying though that fault is."

I shall not insult Mr. Thompson by asking him whether he has read a certain effusion called 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' written by Lord Byron when that poet was a very young man and his critics were seasoned veterans of the *Edinburgh Review*. Here the case is reversed, as the poet happens to be an older man than his critic, and, being a mild Hindu, is not accustomed to reply to his critics. But the phrase Indian Bards and Anglo-Indian Reviewers would be aptly suggestive of the English precedent. It may be even conceded that the critic in this case means well and that he is innocent of any intention of belittling the greatness of the poet. But I have grave doubts whether Mr. Thompson ever realised the full significance of the sentence quoted above. If the poet had not been an Indian would an advice of this kind have been tendered to him? The implication is clear that if the Indian poet had gone to school to two obscure English critics, whose names are unknown outside a small circle of English readers, he would have become a greater poet and avoided some faults. Can the impudence of presumption go beyond this cool suggestion? Who are the two famous critics, any way, who can make great poets? We at this distance have scarcely heard of Dr. Bradley, and if Dr. Bridges is the King's canary who refused to chirp in America, he does not seem to have succeeded in making himself a great poet for all his careful appraisal of Keats. No one can claim perfection for all the works of any poet, for even Homer was seen to nod, but critics can no more make or unmake poets than a peasant can have sunshine or a shower of rain at will.

It did not occur to Mr. Thompson that some of the works of Rabindranath Tagore have been translated into other languages besides English, and French, German, Italian and Scandinavian critics may offer the poet the same sort of advice as that given by Mr. Thompson. A French critic may recom-

commend the poet to study some distinguished French critics and a German may urge the claims of German poet makers and so on. All this advice would be thrown away for the simple reason that the Indian poet is not familiar with all European or Asiatic languages. With a naive complacency Mr Thompson has in most instances tried to discover the source of the Indian poet's inspiration in the writings of some English poets and from this point of view it seems natural that he should advise the Indian poet to turn to English critics for guidance. The influence of earlier poets must necessarily be found in later poets. All the books written by Kalidasa with the exception of the *Meghaduta* are based upon incidents in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* but that takes away nothing from the greatness of Kalidasa. Rabindranath's debt to English poets is very small compared to what he owes to Vaishnava and Sanskrit poetry but that does not affect his own position as a poet at all. Poets make critics critics do not make poets or help them in any way. A poet follows his own light and serves his own genius as best he may. What does it matter to Wordsworth or Keats what Dr Bradley or Dr Bridges may write about them and how is their reputation as poets likely to be affected by any criticism of to day? The world has judged Rabindranath by his work and his critics have followed the path blazed by his fame. His triumphs are his own so are his weaknesses but his work has been treated as a whole and the world ranks him as a poet whose achievement is not bounded by race or country. Any critic is welcome to follow his own judgment as a poet must be free to pursue the bent of his own genius but in Mr Thompson's book there is a distinct trace of that obsession of superiority which has degenerated into megalomania in less reputable writings.

THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE
INCARNATION

THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE INCARNATION

SLOW as has been the growth of human intelligence a definite conception of the Deity has been slower still of realisation, because man had to pierce the multifold veil of nature to get at the single truth behind it. The simplest and strongest evidence is the evidence of the senses, and to them the elemental forces of nature make an irresistible appeal. The ancient Egyptians and the ancient Aryans were among the foremost of the ancient races and they both looked upon the sun as the most potent of the divinities. In the Egyptian pantheon Ra, the sun-god, holds the first place and in the Book of the Dead the most earnest invocations are addressed to him ; in the Vedas Savita or Surya, the sun, is the chief of the gods and the famous *mantram* known as *Gayatri* refers to him. It is somewhat different in Greek and Roman mythologies. These ancient great peoples did not proceed beyond the conception of many gods and goddesses. There was a chief among the gods like Zeus or Jupiter, but he was not identical with the Godhead and the gods had all the failings and passions of men. The Egyptians have been misrepresented as a cruel and fierce people whereas the very ancient Egyptians, five thousand years ago and more, were a very kind-hearted race like the Aryans of ancient India. The ruins of the temples of Isis and Osiris are still to be seen and Typhon closely resembled the Satan of the Old Testament and the Iblis of the Koran. Apart from the gods and the goddesses did the Egyptians believe in the existence of a single, supreme deity? That such a belief did exist may be inferred from a mortuary inscription dated 2200 B.C. containing certain advice given by King Akhtoi to his son : " Rule men as God's little flock, for they are His own images, proceeding from Him. When they weep He hears, and He knows every one

of us by name Kill nobody for God in whose care he is commends him to you Here we have the source of the theory in the Book of Genesis that God made man in His image and after His likeness for the account of the creation is attributed to Moses and Moses came out of Egypt

Besides what may be regarded as the main creeds of the principal human races in the world there is a bewildering variety of beliefs and it is next to impossible to draw the line anywhere as regards the objects worshipped Trees animals birds and stones have received the reverent adoration of human beings The phases of religion include animism fetishism totemism taboo polytheism and pantheism The early Aryan race had Hinduism Buddhism and Zoroastrianism the Mongolian or Turanian race had Confucianism Taoism and Shintoism the Semitic race had Judaism and Islam and Christianity is an advance on the original faith of the Israelites All religious beliefs from the crudest to the highest are based upon a consciousness either dim or distinct of some influence energy or power tangible in a subtle and mysterious fashion but not realisable which shapes the affairs of the universe and controls the destinies of human beings Human intellect conjointly with human faith finds a definite unity of purpose in the vast multiplicity and variety of creation Man may affirm or deny the existence of God that does not in any way affect the law of phenomena An atheist can only deny the existence of God that is a personal deity who is the creator and sustainer of the universe but he cannot deny the immutability of the Law the numerous forces in Nature acting and reacting upon one another the laws that keep the heavenly bodies suspended in space and travelling at incredible speed the rotating cycle of evolution the swift sequence of Life and Death The atomic or electric theory of creation the evolution of cosmos from chaos may be rejected but the universe as it is or the little glimmering of it vouchsafed unto our small intelligence must be

accepted. Man in his pride calls every new discovery of the secrets of nature a conquest of nature as if all nature is exhausted on this little planet on which we, insignificant little midgets, strut about during our hour of existence. When we fly through the air we think we have conquered the millions of unidentified stars and the hundreds of millions of their satellites. The highest human intelligence, all the inventions of man cannot comprehend an infinitesimal part of the universe which comprises nature. The denial of the existence of God is a mere negation and it does not help us at all in understanding the phases of nature. If there is no God there is something else, some Energy of a tremendous activity, some dominating and resistless force which ensures the safe and smooth movement of the innumerable units which make up the universe. Is this power, whatever it may be, devoid of intelligence, is there nothing behind the phenomena manifest to the eye?

This is how the keen human mind in the past, intent on its quest after the truth, must have reasoned: there were the various manifestations of nature forces to which men bent in worship, but even when these forces appeared to be in evident antagonism, they acted in obedience to a common law. The perfect ordering of the visible and invisible universe cannot be the outcome of an aimless and unintelligent purpose. The theory of Causation as far as it can be traced is perfect, and it is only when the beginning of creation presses for a solution that man has to fall back upon speculation. But there is conclusive evidence of uniformity amidst variety, of the inviolability of the law of cause and effect, of a single motive power which sets the whole machinery of the universe in motion and keeps it going through millions and millions of years. This ultimate Energy, the primal creative force at the back of all creation, was named God. And since men worshipped lesser divinities, was it not their obvious duty to worship God, the source of all creation?

This word God or its equivalent in other languages was not among the early words invented by man. The first articulate words of a child are the names of visible objects and persons and the childhood of a race is the same as that of an individual. And when the existence of a supreme but invisible Creator was realised how was He to be designated? The limitations of human language were as great a difficulty as an inaccurate conception of the Deity. How should man speak of God? As a sexless impersonal indefinite entity about which nothing can be predicated? If in speaking of God neither the male nor the female gender is used how is the individuality or the distinctiveness of God to be distinguished? And how is God to be described in language? All the resources of language have been explored to indicate what He is and what He is not. When we speak of His omnipotence we affirm a positive quality but when we declare Him to be infinite we mention a negative attribute. There are two things only that carry a suggestion of the infinite and both are real though intangible. Time and space. The non-existence of time is inconceivable either in the past or in the future which are themselves two phases of time. In like manner space is infinite. It may be measured as distance from one object to another, from the earth to the remotest star but there is space beyond since it has neither a beginning nor an end. Nothing else suggests the infinite. Sirius or the largest star in the unexplored regions of space is merely an orb that impresses the mind with its immensity but in space it is no larger than a mote in a sunbeam.

Some of the profoundest minds among the ancient Aryans in India concentrated the whole of their intellect and the power of meditation in formulating a clear conception of God. They used the fewest possible words so as to avoid anything like prolixity. The aphorisms of the Upanishads are called *mantras* because they are sacred words dealing with what is holiest and highest. A few terse sentences of

the utmost brevity—that is all there is to a *mantram*, but what hours of intense thought, what depths of self-communion must have gone to the composition of each separate sentence, with what infinite patience and care must each separate word have been selected! And even at the present day they are not light reading and do not attract many readers. They are still the arcana of theological lore and the student has to ponder long over each sentence. The Upanishad is the secret doctrine, the wisdom about Brahman. The most remarkable feature of the Upanishads is in the choice of adjectives, the scrupulous regard for precision, the exactitude of expression. The most eloquent evidence of the inadequacy and impotence of language when dealing with the Creator is in the heaping up of negatives. There is an anxious and perpetual vigilance against any word that may convey a wrong impression. There is the initial difficulty of comprehending the incomprehensible, expressing the ineffable. Human language even when it is so perfect as that of the ancient Aryans must be necessarily very limited, and how can it express the limitless? Consequently, many conceptions of the deity are called up only to be rejected as inaccurate.

In the *Isavasya Upanishad*, which is a part of the White Yajur Veda and is reputed to be the oldest of the Upanishads, an invocation to the Creator begins as follows:—"O All-full! O Sole-wise! O All-Judge! O Goal of the Wise!" All the qualities posited in these words are positive. Further on, in the same *mantram* the Creator is spoken of as 'that yonder person (*asau Purushah*).' This implies a definite attribution of personality to God. In later works such as the Puranas, there are various theories about creation. One of these is the emergence of creation from an egg as suggested by the word *Brahmanda* or *Brahma-dimba*. But in the Vedas the oldest speculation about the theory of creation is to be found in the tenth *Mandalam* of the Rig Veda

in some verses of great solemnity and impressive grandeur The Rishi has in his mind the time when there was neither Non Existence nor Existence (*na asat asit noma sat asit*) The statements are partly interrogative and partly affirmative It is recognised that the gods themselves are later than this time The truth about the creation can be known only to the Creator and even here there is a note of scepticism as regards the omniscience of the Deity —

He only the Creator truly knoweth this

And even He perhaps may know it not

Sa anga veda yadi va na veda '

Glimpses of the notion of a single supreme Deity were undoubtedly had by different ancient nations but the Upanishads contain the earliest elaboration in a highly concentrated and abstruse form of the doctrine of a personal God It is an all pervading but an elusive personality to be realised only by intense meditation and patient self communion In these writings there is an overpowering sense of the majesty of the Deity an inconceivable effulgence of His personality and an unfailing solemnity of thought and expression Parallel to this sublime conception of the Godhead must have run the doctrines of Karma and the recurrent cycle of births The immortality of the soul is an essential part of the teaching of the Upanishads and the tenet about the transmigration of souls was not long in following But even as the early imagers of Brahmanic art never thought of making an image of Brahman and the early Buddhist sculptors did not venture to cast a figure of the Buddha so the Rishis of the Vedas and the Upanishads never thought of visualising Brahman or the possibility of His appearance in the flesh The Jiva and the Brahman were alike immortal but there was no occasion for Brahman to appear on earth in the shape of mortal man If one is entitled to form an opinion from the textual testimony of the Upanishads any suggestion of the incarnation of God as a man would have been repudiated as an impious doctrine

Even if this inference is challenged, there is no evidence in the most ancient scriptures of the Aryans of any theory of the incarnation of the Deity as a man living and moving among men. The atmosphere in these books is a vast passionlessness, an immense tranquillity, an unfathomable depth of meditation, and the conception of the Deity is hedged round with a lofty aloofness.

The other ancient conception of a personal God is the Semitic as disclosed in the Old Testament. It opens with a bold and beautifully poetic description of creation which took six days in the making and on the seventh 'God rested from all his work which he had made.' In this and other accounts of creation the earth is naturally treated as the principal object created. In the Book of Genesis there is no detailed description of the creation of the heavenly bodies. Lights were created 'in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,' and it is incidentally added that God 'made the stars also.' Except on the ground that the authority of a Holy Book is not open to question, the account of the creation of man will not bear too close an examination. When Cain was driven out for having slain his brother Abel, he 'went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.' There he took a wife unto himself and had a son by her. Now, at the time Cain slew his brother in the field there were only four human beings in the world, Adam and Eve, and their two sons. How did Cain find a wife and who were her parents?

Broadly speaking, the Aryan and the Semitic faiths are both monotheistic, but the God of the Old Testament is very different from the God of the Upanishads. The first commandment has clear reference to the worship of images in Egypt, because it is immediately preceded by this significant verse:—"I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage." But there are expressions in the Book of Genesis that certainly call for an

explanation. The Jews were furious with Jesus because he called himself the Christ the Son of God. Even on the cross the high priests mocked him saying he had called himself the Son of God and Christ the chosen of God. Was the expression the Son of God considered an offence against God? If so what is to be understood by the first two verses of the sixth chapter of the Book of Genesis? And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born to them that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair and they took them wives of all which they chose. Who were these sons of God who mated with the daughters of men? What was their place in the order of creation? Were they mortals or immortals? It is added that the sons born of these unions became mighty men which were of old men of renown. This was long before Moses received the two tables of stone containing the ten commandments. The sons of God can only be minor divinities and the myth or tradition about them and the daughters of men is precisely the same as that found in Aryan epic poetry and Puranic theology. Several of the heroes in the Mahabharata were born of mixed unions between gods and women and they were also mighty men and men of renown. This must have been a myth in existence both among the Aryan and Semitic races.

In the earlier books of the Old Testament there is a remarkable conception of a personal God—very personal. So vivid and intimate is this personality that you often forget that the language is figurative and poetic. When Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree and clothed themselves in aprons of fig leaves they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and were afterwards punished for their first disobedience. God instructed Noah to make his ark and to put certain beasts and fowls into it. God tempted Abraham and there were covenants between Him and men. There is a persistent suggestion

throughout of a direct vision, a constant and familiar communion as distinguished from communion with God. If a somewhat irreverent expression may be pardoned, it may be truthfully said that much of God's time was spent in looking after the affairs of the descendants of one branch of the progeny of Adam and Eve. The Israelites were the chosen people of God, who is pleased and angry with them by turns. He is in fact no more than a tribal God, of whom nothing can be known beyond His dealings with the children of Israel. The early patriarchs did not formulate any definite law. Moses laid down a complete system of laws and the worship of the Lord God was duly established in the synagogue and the tabernacle. And then followed temporal power and the line of kings and such great names as Saul and David and Solomon, but no prophet or preacher ever foretold of the appearance of God in the flesh and no one in Israel had any thought of an incarnation of God being seen on earth.

The third clear conception of the unity of the 'Godhead' is in Islam. This is the youngest of the great creeds of the world and is based mainly upon the Old Testament and Jewish rabbinical tradition. Every Sura or chapter of the Koran begins with a recital of the compassion and mercifulness of God and His personality overflows throughout the sacred book. There is no room in Islam for any doctrine about the incarnation of God. The Upanishads, the Old Testament, and the Koran rest upon the doctrine of a personal God, but they lend no support to the theory of divine incarnation. Again, there is a marked difference in the attitude of these books: the Upanishads over and over again dwell on the difficulty in comprehending God and compassing him in language; the Old Testament displays no such hesitation and uses the most positive and intimate language in respect of God, and this is also the case to a considerable extent in the Koran.

Where are we to look for the beginning of anthropomorphism, or the representation of the Deity in the form of man,

the ascription to Him of human affections and passions? According to one view this is to be sought for in polytheism in which powers of nature are worshipped and personified. Anthropomorphism is considered as the inversion of the truth contained in Genesis instead of viewing man as made in God's image it makes God in man's image and sees in Him some of the limits and many of the imperfections which exist in man. This on the face of it is an unsound argument. When anything is made in the image of another the resemblance between the two is obvious and if man is the image the original who is God must be inferred to be like him. In recounting how Pharaoh's host was drowned in the Red Sea Moses exclaims in exulting gratitude. The Lord is a man of war. Who is like unto thee O Lord among the gods?

Who is like thee glorious in holiness fearful in praises doing wonders? ¹ What image is conveyed by designating God a man of war? Note also the reference to other gods the gods that Moses had seen worshipped in Egypt. It seems scarcely open to question that the God of the Old Testament is conceived more or less as a superman with human qualities. A flaw in the Judaic notion of God has been pointed out in the Koran. The expression that God rested on the Sabbath after the creation is an admission of fatigue the physical reaction after bodily and mental toil. This statement in the Old Testament is corrected in the fiftieth Sura of the Koran.

We created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days and no weariness touched us.

The existence of God being universally admitted the only bar to the establishment of a universal religion would seem to be racial and linguistic differences but there is also an exclusiveness of another kind. There must have been an extensive interfusion of blood between the early Aryan colonists and the indigenous primitive races of India and this mixed

¹ Exodus Chapter 15

race was admitted to the creed of Brahmanism without any difficulty until suddenly the door was closed and no converts were admitted to the religion now called Hinduism. A Jew like a Hindu must be born within the pale. No outsiders or converts are allowed. Yet the Vedas and the Vedanta as well as the Old Testament are revealed in the sense that supernatural or divine authority is claimed for them. No scriptures are universally accepted as revealed, and the God of one religion is not allowed to be worshipped by the followers of another religion. How can there be any reservation in a house of God, how can any place of worship be desecrated by any man? Why should not a Mussalman enter a synagogue, or a Christian a Hindu temple if God is believed to be the Creator of all men and all things? There is a feeling of exclusive possessiveness, and the fiction of every man being another man's brother is exploded as soon as one thinks of a house of God common to all men.

Thus it will be seen that the conception of a Personal God in all religions is more or less anthropomorphic, since it can be scarcely anything else. The Upanishads repeatedly declare that He is without form, *nirakara*, but His attributes invest Him with a definite personality and the *Advaita* doctrine identifies the *Jiva* with Brahman. There is a theory, which I do not accept, that this affords an explanation of the doctrine of divine incarnation, or *Avatara*, because the avatars mentioned in the Puranas are not incarnations of the Brahman of the Upanishads. The legend of the *Dasavatar*, or ten avatars, sung in exquisite verse by Jayadeva, is of considerable significance. In fact, it has a direct bearing on the theory of evolution and the origin of species. The first three avatars are the fish, the turtle, and the boar. This is a clear reference to the ancient biological periods of the world's history, the very remote past in which different forms of life appeared in different ages. Two other avatars, *Narasimha*, or man-lion, and *Vamana*, or the dwarf, appeared for a single specific purpose each, the

former for slaying the demon King Hiranyakasipu, the cruel and unnatural father of the devout and saintly Prahlada and the latter for tricking King Bali and transferring him to the kingship of the nether regions. Neither of these avatars nor Parasuram the fierce exterminator of the Kshatriyas can be said to have exercised any beneficent influence on the times in which they appeared. The first avatar who is worshipped to this day and whose memory and personality are surrounded by an undying halo of sanctity is Rama and the book that records the story of his life is the earliest and greatest epic in the world. According to the Ramayana which is the first and final authority on this subject Rama represented half the divinity of Vishnu who is one of the Trimurti or Triad to whom are delegated the three functions of creating sustaining and destroying. But the three divinities Brahma Vishnu and Maheswara or Siva are not the Brahman or the Purusha of the Upanishads. Sri Krishna was also an avatar of Vishnu. The Mahabharata gives no account of his early life and Sri Krishna comes into the narrative of the epic as one who needs no introduction. For a complete story of his life we have to turn to the Harivamsa the Bhagavat and the Brahmavarvata Purana, which are much later than the Mahabharata. It is a matter of considerable doubt whether the Bhagavadgita is an integral part of the original text of the Mahabharata. But there is no doubt whatsoever of the high authority or the supremely ethical teaching of the Gita. Nowhere in the whole range of history or tradition is there another instance of such a setting for so amazing a picture. One cannot conceive of anything more dramatic than the immediate environment of the Gita. It was not in the seclusion and silence of a Rishi's hermitage in the forest that the lofty message of the Gita was delivered. The place chosen was the most imposing battlefield of which there is any record in India. Two mighty hosts were facing each other waiting for the signal to join battle. The air was tense and surcharged with the passions of men about

to rush against one another in mortal combat. And the prologue to the battle was this high discourse, the profound and passionless words that the Lord Sri Krishna spoke and which Arjuna alone heard. The first initiate in the doctrine of the Gita was a warrior-prince who led his host to battle with the words of Sri Krishna's teachings humming in his ears and echoing in his heart.

Among revealed scriptures the Gita must rank high for it is neither supernatural nor inspired either through a Rishi or a prophet, but a direct and marvellous exposition by an avatar, who, while affirming to be a manifestation of Vishnu claimed to be God incarnate. But the Gita does not either transcend or supersede the Upanishads, the truths of which are reaffirmed. The one new and sublime truth is the insistence on *Nishkama Karma*, the performance of duty without any thought of a reward, all merit accruing to God. There is nothing finer, nobler or more altruistic in any doctrinal teaching. In the Gita Sri Krishna as an avatar is both personal and pantheistic. Note the twenty-fourth verse in the fourth chapter in which the burnt offering to the sacrificial fire, the clarified butter to feed the flame, the performer of the *Homa* are all identified with Brahman. Next, there is the categorical identity of Sri Krishna as the Deity with the chiefest of all things, including animals and plants. Still the spoken words charged as they were with the profoundest wisdom did not wholly satisfy Arjuna who craved for a sight of the Lord in the full splendour of his majesty. How could mortal eyes behold the Lord of the universe? And so for a brief space Sri Krishna endowed Arjuna with heavenly vision so that he was able to see the Viswarupa (image of the universe) of the Avatar who laid aside his human form. And Arjuna alone saw that form just as he alone heard all the eighteen chapters of the gospel of the Gita. The epic imagination never soared so high as it did in ancient India, and the image of the Deity comprehending the universe is worthy of

the imagination of a great epic poet. It was the universe that Arjuna saw mirrored and he saw future events happening like the present, the various aspects of the Deity including that of Rudra, the Terrible, and the effulgence of a thousand suns issuing from the Viswarupa. And yet by a single subtle suggestion it is demonstrated that what Arjuna saw was formless, *nirākara*, for that bewildered and terrified prince, while entreating Sri Krishna to resume his human shape, said, "O Lord of the Universe, Image of the Universe, I do not see the end, the middle, nor again the beginning of thy form." There were no dimensional outlines and consequently there was no form. One is reminded of the transfiguration of Jesus Christ on a high mountain witnessed by Peter, James and John. It was not such an overwhelming sight as the Viswarupa, but it is said "his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light" and Moses and Elias appeared and talked with him.

The transfiguration of the Buddha was due to the light of enlightenment the triumphant attainment to the supreme knowledge of Nirvana. Buddhist poets and religious writers have described this change as miraculous, but it was quite human. The first transfiguration took place under the Bodhi tree after the rout of Mara's host and the second under the twin Sal trees when the Master was about to pass into the final mahaparinirvana. An account of the first is given in Lalita Vistara and the second is described in the Mahapan nibbana Sutta the Book of the Great Decease. The Buddha was on his deathbed and in reply to a question of Ananda, loyal and faithful to the end said — "There are two occasions on which the face of a Tathagata (a Buddha) becomes exceeding bright on the night in which he attains supreme and perfect insight and again on the night when he passes finally away out of existence."

The inclusion of the Buddha among the ten avatars is a remarkable example of Aryan catholicity and tolerance. He.

did not call himself an avatar of Vishnu and his followers do not do so. He did not recognise the revealed authority of the Vedas ; he declined to formulate any theory about creation ; a personal God was to him as impermanent as the minor gods ; he maintained silence as regards an impersonal God ; the sacrificial rites of the Vedas were to him anathema ; the supremacy of the Brahman was nothing to him and he swept caste aside in the great Brotherhood of the Sangha that he founded, and he accepted alike the food of a king, an untouchable and a courtesan. From the lordliest to the lowliest all came to him and he taught them all alike. His great renunciation and his greater compassion invested him with divinity and he is reckoned the ninth avatar.

The Puranas speak of only one other avatar and he is yet to come. But in India the belief in avatars has become so deep-rooted and so common that scarcely a century passes without some one being designated an incarnation of God or Vishnu on account of the saintliness of his character or his miraculous powers. His following may not be large but some people will always be found to have implicit faith in him and to look upon him as the image of the deity in the flesh. Sometimes this faith becomes pathetic as when an avatar is dying of an incurable disease but his disciples believe that he can easily cure himself by exercising his will power. Two or three avatars have been heard of simultaneously in different parts of the country. This is not in accordance with the dictum of Sri Krishna in the Gita that such incarnations take place *yuga* after *yuga*, or cycle after cycle, for a specific purpose. Of the several incarnations of Vishnu that have been heard of in the last five hundred years, how many can be ranked with Rama, Krishna or the Buddha?

If Jesus Christ had been born in India he would in every probability have been classified as an avatar after the Buddha, but he was born among a people which recognised patriarchs and prophets but no incarnation of God. All the early con-

verts to Christianity were found among the Jews the Romans and the Greeks and later on in the pagan races of Northern Europe with their various crude forms of faith and worship. There was no unity of tradition or coherence of religious belief among these semi barbarous races of the north. The Druidical races had nothing in common with the Norsemen of Scandinavia. The paganism of Rome and Greece was of another kind. The only monotheistic people that had a clear notion of a personal God were the Jews and they put Jesus Christ to death. Except the apostles and some few others the Jews refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth and remained staunch as ever to the God of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Jacob and the God of Moses. In these circumstances the harmonious and consistent evolution of religious thought and doctrine that was witnessed in India became impossible in Europe. The Gospels by themselves do not constitute an independent religious system without the Old Testament and the followers of the latter the learned Rabbis and priests would have nothing to do with the New Testament. The important and difficult duty of interpreting the teachings of Jesus Christ and reconciling them with the older doctrines of the Jewish scriptures and expounding the extremely complex conception of the Trinity devolved upon men who knew nothing about a Creator and a Personal God until their conversion to the new faith and whose past and hereditary knowledge of religion was a confused recollection of a heterogenous paganism. Read the Acts of the Apostles and you will at once understand why it is so difficult to explain the place of the Holy Ghost in the Trinity. The true conception of a triple personality jeopardises the supreme singularity of the Creator. The conflict between the Mosaic Law and the teachings of Jesus Christ is so direct and so pointed that it is not possible to accept them both with equal faith. Grave misunderstandings between the dignitaries of the church are not an unusual occurrence even at the present day. There is no justification

for any schism in the Christian church and yet it is divided into many sects. If the view of Emanuel Swedenborg, namely, that God is Christ and Christ is God, had been generally accepted the place of Christ as an incarnation of God would have become secure and doctrinal cleavages would have been minimised. No one, whether a Christian or not, can fail to recognise in Jesus Christ one of the gentlest and greatest personalities that the world has ever known just as it is not necessary to be a Buddhist to discover the goodness, the love and the holiness and the wisdom of the Buddha. There have been and may still be found earnest and devout Christians who follow the teachings of the Christ with an humble and contrite heart, but in no country in Europe has there been a national assimilation of the genuine humility and submissiveness, the charity and compassion that form the predominant note in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

From an early period of the Christian era has been noticeable the scornful contempt for all other religions, not only paganism and heathenism but also the strict and orthodox monotheism of Islam. To a certain extent it was the zeal of new converts whose ancestors had no idea of the Deity as one without a second. This attitude has never changed. With the growth of territorial possessions and the increase of material wealth Europe became full of the pride and pitilessness that was Rome. What is called the materialism of the West is in reality the inability of all the nations of Europe to realise the teachings of Jesus Christ as a living faith. The mere profession of any religion means nothing unless it is interwoven into the texture of national life and becomes an abiding guide of conduct. Is it not obvious to the thinking mind and the seeing eye that the same causes that brought about the downfall of Greece and Rome are actively at work in Europe? In an English book of reference which need not be specified the superiority of Christianity over Islam is based on the theory that Islam is a creed that can found an empire, but not govern

it is this in accord with the words of the Christ who spoke always and only of the kingdom of heaven? Is the founding and the governing of an empire so rare a feat that it has been possible of accomplishment only by some Christian nations of Europe? To link up religion with empire is to lower religion and not to magnify an empire. Did not Egypt have an empire which she governed for hundreds if not thousands of years? What was the religion of Greece and Rome and did not both of them found and govern empires? Babylon set up her idols of metals and stone and governed an empire of dazzling magnificence. The Persians and the Medes worshipped fire and ruled over the greatest empire in Asia. What is the age of the empires of Europe compared with the hoary island empire of Japan whose soil has never been defiled by the foot of the invader? And where are the empires of Europe? Where are the empires of Germany, Russia and Austria? Something like ten years ago Europe was on the verge of self extinction and the menace is not the less grave now because of the apparent quiescence which is the inevitable reaction of the tomado of death and destruction which swept over Europe and part of two other continents during the world war. It is blasphemous to drag the holy name of the Son of Man who suffered at Calvary into this unholy war. It was a sacrifice at the blazing altar of Materialism and Molochism into whose insatiate maw empires and nations have disappeared. Europe would have been happier and safer to day if it could have appreciated the personality of Jesus Christ and incorporated his teachings with national life.

The case of Europe is a warning and not an invitation to imitation. The doctrine of divine incarnation is one of the phases of belief in a personal God. It has to be accepted with certain reservations for no incarnation of the Deity ceases to be a man because a certain number of people look upon him as the living God. There is the intense longing for a sight of God because He cannot be seen and men discover Him in

a man with God-like attributes. It has been made out that when a god or God himself appears in the flesh there happens to be a miraculous birth. Miracles are intended to strengthen faith and it seems repugnant to the faithful that a divinity should come into the world in the same way as a human child. But an avatar or an incarnation of the Deity dies in the same way as ordinary mortals. Rama entered the river Sarayu and passed out of life, Sri Krishna was stricken to the death by a common huntsman, the Buddha died a natural death in extreme old age and Jesus Christ was crucified as a common malefactor.

There is a widespread belief among the followers of several religions in the coming of a future avatar or prophet. The Hindus believe in the future incarnation of Vishnu as Kalki who will appear as an avatar of destruction. The Buddhists believe in the coming of Maitreya as the next Buddha. The Jews deny that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and they firmly believe that the Messiah is yet to come. Christians believe that Jesus Christ will reappear on earth on the Day of Judgment. The Shia sect of Mussalmans believe the Imam Mahdi will return to earth with Elija to complete the establishment of Islam throughout the world. These are vivid articles of faith which are firmly held by the different peoples that have been named.

Religion based firmly on the recognition of the existence of a First Cause and Creator is not a sentiment, nor a solace of old age. What is the moral of the beautiful legends about Dhruva and Prahlada? The reason why such stories cannot be found in any other country is that the ancient Aryans alone worked out the doctrine of Karma and the theory of previous births and the special gift of remembering them. Out of the mouths of these babes was faith in a living God justified. Is the faith of a man to be less than a child's? Consider this parallel sentiment in Ecclesiastes:—"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw

nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them " No strength is greater than the strength of faith, from which outflows a perennial, vivifying and vitalising stream of spirit sustenance which reacts on the physical plane and enhances the endurance and the power of resistance of the race Given a faith in the Maker and Upholder of the universe, a faith that pounds and pulsates with the heart beats of a nation, that nation is assured of a long lease of life while other nations of a doubtful and obscure faith may rise and disappear with a passing flash of brilliance We need not speak of India which may yet survive some more empires but in Europe itself there is the amazing example of the vitality of the Jews We have here a race which has held steadfastly to its God from the days of Abraham In their house of bondage in Egypt where they were cruelly ill treated and forced to make bricks without straw under the lash of the taskmaster the Jews refused to bow down and worship the strange gods of Egypt Moses lived in the house of the Pharos before he and his people escaped from serfdom When the thousand years of Jewish supremacy were over the race passed successively under the domination of the Babylonians the Persians and the Romans With the rise of Christianity the Jews became a hunted people with the brand of Cain on their foreheads Their homeland knew them no more and they became homeless fugitives on the face of Europe and Asia They were driven into filthy ghettos like unclean animals the baiting of Jews became almost a sport they were subjected to civil disqualifications of all kinds they were slaughtered wholesale in the terrible pogroms in Russia But they have not been exterminated On the contrary they are returning in steadily increasing numbers to Palestine and there is a considerable Jewish population in Jerusalem itself The Israelites have seen Egypt Babylon ancient Persia, Greece and Rome pass but they are still a vigorous and active race that has succeeded in life in despite of all difficulties When the whole of Europe was tottering the jews were in no way

disconcerted and they may be trusted to stand clear of the falling debris of crumbling empires and vanishing races. What is the secret of the persistent and unquenchable vitality of the Hebrew race?

The warning is writ large for all the world to read and heed if it will. Belief is necessary not merely for the salvation of the individual but the security of the race. The teaching that has fallen on barren soil in Europe was known and followed in another part of the world long ago. Man does not live by bread alone nor does a nation live by power and wealth alone. For national ideals we must look beyond and behind Europe, for she lacks the wherewithal which will ensure a reasonable length of national life. Hold fast to the ancient faith and the ancient ideal of renunciation. Just as the light and life of the world come from the sun, the chief of ancient gods, so the true stimulus of national endeavour and existence comes from a source outside ourselves. Loosen your grip on the faith that has held the race so long together and you lose all.